

# New Age of Harding

Political Discourses in the United States Regarding the Rebuilding of the  
International Relations in the Debate on the Treaties of the Washington  
Conference in 1922

Master's Thesis

Department of History and Ethnology

University of Jyväskylä

2021

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Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellinen	Laitos – Department Historian ja etnologian laitos
Tekijä – Author Joel Nyman	
Työn nimi – Title New Age of Harding: Political Discourses in the United States Regarding the Rebuilding of the International Relations in the Debate on the Treaties of the Washington Conference in 1922	
Oppiaine – Subject Historia	Työn laji – Level Pro Gradu
Aika – Month and year Toukokuu 2021	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 84
Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Torjuttuaan jäsenyyden Kansainliitossa ensimmäisen maailmansodan jälkeen, Yhdysvaltojen oli muodostettava ulkopoliittikkansa uudelle pohjalle. Presidentti Wilsonia seurannut uusi Republikaanihallinto ei toisaalta voinut viedä maata Kansainliittoon sisäpoliittisista syistä mutta toisaalta lisääntyneen keskinäisriippuvuuden vuoksi se ei voinut omaksua eristäytymispolitiikkaakaan kuten nationalistisimmat elementit amerikkalaisessa yhteiskunnassa vaativat. Washingtonin konferenssissa 1921-1922 Wilsonia seurannut Republikaanihallinto määrittä uuden suunnan maan sodanjälkeiselle ulkopoliitikalle, mikä toimi esikuvana myöhemmille hallinnoille sotienvälisenä aikana.</p> <p>Pro gradu- työssäni pyrin analysoimaan ja rekonstruoimaan Washingtonin konferenssin kansainvälisiä sopimuksia koskevia poliittisia diskursseja, kun nämä saapuivat Senaatin käsittelyyn maaliskuussa 1922. Pyrin työssäni selvittämään sitä, että miten aikalaiset käsitteellisivät ideaalin kansainvälisen järjestyksen rakenteen ja Yhdysvaltojen aseman sodanjälkeisessä maailmassa 1920-luvun alussa. Työ on analyttisesti jaettu kolmeen osaan. Ensimmäisessä osassa keskitytään nationalismiin ja internationalismiin väliseen jännitteeseen; siihen miten maan tulisi lähestyä kansainvälisiä suhteita yleisellä tasolla. Toisessa osassa huomio on puolestaan kansallisen suvereniteetin kansainvälisille sitoumuksille asettamissa vaateissa, kun taas kolmannessa osassa keskitytään aikalaiskeskusteluissa vallinneisiin käsityksiin demokratiasta ja julkisesta mielipiteestä kestävän rauhan takaajina. Keskeinen tutkimustulos on, että Washingtonin konferenssin kautta Republikaanit loivat perustan rajalliselle internationalismille ja uudelle, konservatiivisemmalle ulkopoliittiselle konsensukselle.</p> <p>Metodologisesti tutkimus yhdistää toisiinsa aate-, käsite- ja poliittisen historian lähestymistapoja sekä diskurssianalyysia. Tutkimuksessa hyödynnetty alkuperäislähdeaineisto koostuu puolueohjelmista vuosilta 1920 ja 1924 sekä Senaatin debateista että lehtiartikkeleista kolmesta eri lehdestä: New York Timesista, New York Tribunesta ja New York Worldista. Tutkimuksen aikaväli ulottuu helmikuun lopulta viikkoa ennen kuin konferenssin sopimukset astuivat Senaatin käsiteltäväksi maaliskuussa 1922 viikko sen jälkeen, kun Senaatti lopulta hyväksyi viimeisetkin sopimukset maaliskuun lopussa.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords Yhdysvallat, the United States, aseistariisunta, disarmament, Washingtonin konferenssi, the Washington Conference, kansainväliset suhteet, international relations	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository Jyväskylän yliopisto/JYX	
Muita tietoja – Additional information	

## Abstract

After having rejected the membership in the League of Nations after the First World War, the United States had to found its foreign policy on a new basis. On one hand, the new Republican administration succeeding President Wilson could not reintroduce the League membership to the Senate due to the reasons related to domestic politics, but on the other, it could not adopt the foreign policy of national isolation either as the most nationalist elements in the American society demanded due to increasing interconnectedness. In the 1921-1922 Washington Conference, the Republican administration laid the groundwork for new postwar American foreign policy as the conference functioned as a model for the future administrations in the interwar era.

In my master's thesis, I seek to reconstruct and analyze the political discourses that surrounded the international treaties of the Washington Conference as they entered the Senate's deliberation in March 1922. The aim is to reconstruct and analyze how the contemporaries conceptualized the ideal structure for the postwar world order and what should be the position of the United States in it at the beginning of the 1920s. This thesis is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on the tense relationship between internationalism and nationalism; on how the country should approach international relations on the most general level. The second chapter explores what type of international commitments were acceptable to the contemporaries, while the third part looks into the various contemporary understandings on democracy and public opinion as guarantors of peace. The key finding of this thesis is that, through the Washington Conference, the Republicans laid the basis for the limited form of internationalism and new conservative foreign policy consensus.

Methodologically, this thesis combines conceptual-, intellectual- and political history and discourse analysis. The primary source material for this thesis includes party platforms from 1920 and 1924, and both Senate debates and newspaper articles from three different newspapers: the New York Times, the New York Tribune, and the New York World. The period of time under consideration in this research extends from the week before the first of the international treaties entered the deliberation of the Senate on March 2, 1922, to the week after the Senate finally voted in favor of the last of the treaties at the end of March.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Research Questions and Sources

Create a new spirit, put by the old diplomacy, and come into the new age of Harding. That is the lesson of the Washington conference. (...) There are many serious questions in the air pressing for international solution that carry with them the germs of possible wars. The Washington conference has shown the way to solve these pressing problems, how to handle these difficulties so that they will not lead to war and embroil all the nations.<sup>1</sup> – The San Francisco Chronicle; Duraind, George

After the Republican-controlled Senate had rejected the United States membership in the League of Nations in the early 1920s thereby excluding the country from the new international organization, the United States reaffirmed its commitment to creating peace at the 1921-1922 Washington Conference, which was organized under Republican President Warren G. Harding. This was seen as an indication of the direction that the United States would take in achieving its ideal world system. As the above quotation from an article added to the Congressional Records by Samuel Shortridge (R-CA) suggests, the conference was regarded as laying the blueprint for further advances toward peace and the basis for “the new age of Harding.” Instead of committing to international cooperation through any world organization, the United States under the Republican leadership preferred solving global problems – the most pertinent of which seemed to be the armament competition – through conferences organized in the spirit of open diplomacy. The aim was to reduce the possibility of wars and, through openness, to utilize the power of global public opinion to curb unlawful and aggressive international conduct.

The Washington Conference established the direction of American foreign policy in the interwar era. The succeeding administrations, rather than trying to solve global problems via the mechanisms set up by the League of Nations, sought to expand the disarmament measures and to build international norms by means of new conferences. For this reason, the identification of the factors influencing the policies pursued by the succeeding Republican administrations in the 1920s can be expanded by researching the contemporary debates on the treaties of the Washington Conference, in which the course for a new American foreign policy was both justified and challenged. This, in turn, exposes the matter of historical contingency. Though we know now that the interwar efforts to create the basis for lasting postwar peace failed as the world plunged into the Second World War in the 1930s (the destruction of which overshadowed that of the First that had ended only 20 years earlier), no element of this was neither preordained nor evident to the contemporaries. Operating under considerable constraints, the Republican governments sought to restructure the world system on a more peaceful

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<sup>1</sup> Shortridge, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.23.1922, pp 4332

basis – the efforts of which, however, were brought to a close by the resurgence of insular policies and aggressive nationalism that followed the Great Depression in the early 1930s.

In this thesis, I will analyze and reconstruct the political discourses that surrounded the international treaties of the Washington Conference as they entered the deliberation of the Senate in March 1922. My research focus is both on historical semantics and pragmatics regarding the complicated and often tense relationship between the international and national: That is, on concepts, metaphors, tropes and terms on one hand, and rhetorical devices and speech acts on the other as related to the contesting and differing conceptualizations of the international order and the position of the United States in it in the postwar world. Consequently, rather than focusing on formal diplomacy or the political actions of the administration officials, the research focus in this thesis is on the contemporary discourse pertaining to the national and international as they emerged within the political debate – in the interconnected forums of the media and the Senate (the role of which in foreign policy was invigorated by the debate over and subsequent rejection of membership in the League of Nations). By analyzing the debate, the aim of this thesis is to outline the competing contemporary understandings of how to approach international relations, which, in turn, is significant due to the increased global influence of the United States after the war and its position as a leading great power in the interwar era.

The primary sources used in my thesis are comprised of Senate debates and newspaper articles from the week before the first of the international treaties entered the deliberation of the Senate on March 2, 1922, to the week after the debate concluded on March 30, when the last of the treaties were voted upon. The largest and most important body of source material consists of the treaty debates in the Senate that are available from the United States Government's Publishing Office's online database. In contrast to the House of Representatives, the Constitution grants the Senate a key role in determining foreign policy. In addition to its advisory role in the treaty-making process, its consent is also required before a treaty becomes law. And, due to its accentuated function as a deliberative body, the debates that occur within the Senate provide not only a crucial but also an excellent venue for reconstructing the varied and multifaceted contemporaneous discourse on international relations in the early 1920s: The Senate rules grant a minority party and an individual Senator significant leeway in hindering and prolonging the legislative process, which is further emphasized by the fact that the approval of a treaty requires a two-thirds majority.<sup>2</sup> This, in effect, requires bipartisan support in the Senate, which, in turn, creates pressure for discursive control and active public engagement.

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<sup>2</sup> Gold 2008, 8–13, 104; Gould 2009, 6-8

The newspaper articles used in this thesis expand the analytical focus of my research onto the public discourse more broadly. Because Senators often commented on what they have read in the papers, the concomitant analysis of Congressional and press sources amalgamates two interconnected forums on which foreign policy was discussed and debated. Three newspapers were selected on the basis of their partisan leanings and the level of their circulation at the beginning of the 1920s: The New York World, The New York Tribune, and The New York Times. The largest of these in terms of circulation was the World, which, like the Times, had Democratic and pro-League leanings. The Times, the only one of these three that is still in circulation, had a reputation for being a substantial and trustworthy paper often read by political elites.<sup>3</sup> The Tribune, in contrast, was an anti-League and pro-Republican newspaper, representing the conservative side of the political spectrum in this research.<sup>4</sup> Using the same time frame as in the Congressional Records, the newspaper articles related to the Washington Conference that are used in this thesis have been gathered through digitalized archives. While I have used the Times' own online archives that are available through its website, both the World's and the Tribune's articles have been collected using the digitalized databases of the Library of Congress.

The third source material used in this research consists of party platforms from 1920 and 1924 – both immediately before and after the Washington Conference that ended at the beginning of 1922. These are digitally available from the online archives of The American Presidency Project. In addition to both the Democratic and Republican parties, the platforms used in the research for this thesis also include the Progressive party platform from 1924. Established during the election year by Robert La Follette Sr. (R-WI), the Progressive party was ultimately as short-lived as La Follette's third-party candidacy which failed to challenge the two-party hegemony that still exists in American politics, as he won only his home state of Wisconsin, receiving 17% of the popular vote.<sup>5</sup> By including the party platforms as source material, my aim is to reconstruct the progression of the parties' positions and expectations regarding international relations at the beginning of the 1920s. However, the platforms occupy more of a supplementary role in the analysis because they do not directly answer the research objective, which is to analyze and reconstruct the political discourses that surrounded the treaties of the Washington Conference as they entered into the deliberation of the Senate in 1922.

This thesis is comprised of five chapters. An introduction to the research topic, questions, sources, and methodological background is covered in the first chapter. The chapters that follow, which are related to the analysis, are thematically divided into three different parts. The second chapter explores

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<sup>3</sup> Douglas 1999, 95-96, 125

<sup>4</sup> Cooper Jr. 1969, 121

<sup>5</sup> Gould 2009, 80; Unger 2000, 297-299

the theme of nationalism or patriotism versus internationalism – of how to approach international relations on the most general level. While some of the most influential Senators in the early 1920s were supportive of an insular nationalism that rejected international cooperation altogether, most of the Senate supported a limited form of internationalism that was mindful of national interests. As the third chapter examines the relationship between national sovereignty and international obligations, it is noted that despite the extensive support for increasing international engagement, different sets of paradigms for this engagement existed in the political discourse, which created different sets of limitations concerning how to approach international affairs. The fourth chapter, in turn, delves into the notions of democracy and public opinion as the guarantors of world peace, and the role of the Washington Conference in promoting these. The fifth chapter provides a concluding overview of the discursive process and the different contemporary understandings of how to appropriately approach postwar international relations.

## **1.2 Methodology**

This research combines methodologies from discourse analysis and conceptual history along with the analyses of intellectual and political history. As a history of political discourse, the methodological premise of this research rests on an understanding of politics as shaped by discursive processes that occur in various places and times, in which policies form as a result of interaction among various historical agents who both contest and reproduce their proposals within an institutional framework. This complicates an understanding of causal chains in the study of past politics, as policies are seen as resulting from the discursive processes that have engendered both the contesting and ideologically infused views and conceptualizations of policies at hand.<sup>6</sup> As Mia Halonen, Pasi Ihalainen and Taina Saarinen have argued, this type of study of past politics as discursive processes helps to surpass the ostensible methodological distinctions between the research of political action, on one hand, and the research of political discourse as traditionally studied in the history of political thought, on the other. That is, in this type of “history of argumentation,” the use of language is seen as an integral part of political action as discourses affect the ways in which policy ideas translate into policy action.<sup>7</sup>

This type of discourse-oriented understanding of past politics, in which the focus is on argumentation and the use of terms, tropes and concepts as applied in numerous arguments by past political actors,

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<sup>6</sup> Ihalainen 2017b, 37-38; Halonen & Ihalainen & Saarinen 2015, 3-5

<sup>7</sup> Halonen & Ihalainen & Saarinen 2015, 3-5; Ihalainen & Saarinen 2015, 33-34

is particularly suitable for the research of parliamentary politics as in here in case of the United States Senate. Parliaments, as Cornelia Ilie argues, constitute a forum for deliberation, legislation, problem-solving and decision-making in which “the struggle over the use of language” must be considered “as a concrete manifestation of the struggle over for power.” In other words, the use of language is crucial in either gaining or challenging political power in parliamentary institutions.<sup>8</sup> And, as Ilie argues, it is particularly in parliaments where “political issues, ideological definitions, and discursive practices” can be both constructed and justified in representative democracies such as the United States.<sup>9</sup> Thus, as parliaments function as communicative platforms for debating views and ideas and policy-choices, parliaments are central arenas for reflecting general societal dissensus. The strength of parliamentary rhetoric is then in its antagonistic spirit as there always are at least two sides for each political question – for and against.<sup>10</sup>

It is also important to consider the multilayered and multisided nature of political discourse. In the parliamentary setting, politicians are influenced not only by their partisan leanings or the concerns of their constituencies but also by their unique backgrounds, various identities, and experiences that may have affected their speech acts and hence the shape of the political discourse itself. These roles may include among others personal relationships, institutional and private roles, and party affiliations that may have inspired the motivations of various historical agents.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, as Halonen, Ihalainen and Saarinen have argued, political discourses are both temporally and spatially multi-sited and -layered, including historical trajectories with linkages to other debates, which can amalgamate in a given place and time and give rise to new political discourses. The contextualization of multilayered networks of discourses, as Halonen, Ihalainen and Saarinen consider, is important to understanding political discourse as action – even when the focus is on a particular context.<sup>12</sup> Here, the particular attention has been paid to the preceding debates in the 1910s and to the contemporary British context due to the interrelatedness of the Anglo-American discourses.

In the study of political discourses, there have traditionally been two types of methodologies, which have sometimes – and often needlessly – been viewed in contrast to each other: While the Anglophone research spearheaded by the so-called Cambridge School has put the emphasis on researching the speech acts of individual historical agents in their unique speaking situations, trying to reconstruct the rhetorical moves of a given historical actor, conceptual historians most notably represented by

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<sup>8</sup> Ilie 2016, 134

<sup>9</sup> Ilie 2010, 1

<sup>10</sup> Ilie 2016, 134-135

<sup>11</sup> Ilie 2010, 2, 13; Ihalainen 2017b, 37-38; Halonen & Ihalainen & Saarinen 2015, 17

<sup>12</sup> Halonen & Ihalainen & Saarinen 2015, 15-17; see also Ihalainen 2017b, 39-40

Reinhart Koselleck and his pupils have concentrated on studying political discourses as a communal activity, paying close attention to the contextual continuities and the recycling of political language.<sup>13</sup> In this thesis, the former approach to the study of political discourses has been more dominant than the latter, and the main focus has consequently been on reconstructing the argumentative moves or interventions of historical actors in the political debate. Yet, as emphasized by continental conceptual historians, close attention has also been paid to key or basic concepts, which, as Kari Palonen, Taru Haapala and Claudia Wiesner have argued, are the “nodal points” in political debate.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, as favored by Anglophone historians, the focus in this research is on the use of concepts, terms, and tropes as part of larger linguistic struggles and their usage in speech acts within the political debate.<sup>15</sup>

The aim of the Cambridge School of study of intellectual history represented most notably by Quentin Skinner is to discover what an individual did with words as she participated in a particular discourse or discourses in a unique social, cultural, political, and ideological context. In other words, a text and the use of language has to be viewed as a rhetorical move or intervention in a larger communicative process and as operating within the conventions created by social, linguistic, and political norms and morals – within which the agents aimed at *doing* something. Thus, the emphasis is on reconstructing the contemporary linguistic conventions that enabled and regulated the use of language, and hence to discover the intention of a historical agent, who, rather than trying to answer “eternal” questions, sought to answer political questions set up by contemporary political realities. This, in turn, enables the reconstruction of not only argumentative meanings but also beliefs as preconditions for rhetorical moves.<sup>16</sup> As Skinner argues, the aim then is not to evaluate the contemporary beliefs normatively; a historian, according to him, “need only be claiming that he or she has uncovered the prevailing norms for the acquisition and justification of beliefs in that particular society and that the belief in question appears to have been upheld in the face of rather than in the light of those norms themselves.”<sup>17</sup>

The approach advocated by the Cambridge School historians is particularly applicable to the study of parliamentary politics as in here because these institutions are largely based on rhetorical action. As deliberative bodies, which are founded on the rhetorical principle of *pro et contra* (of speaking either for or against on items in a given agenda), speaking is the key part of political action in parliaments.<sup>18</sup> And, as discussed above, because the validity of an argument is intertwined with the support given to

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<sup>13</sup> Ihalainen 2017a, 75; Freedon 2017, 54-55

<sup>14</sup> Wiesner & Haapala & Palonen 2017, 77

<sup>15</sup> Palonen 2017, 97-99; Palonen 2003, 32

<sup>16</sup> Hyrkkänen 2017, 44-50; Palonen & Summa 1996, 42-50; Tully 1988, 73-77

<sup>17</sup> Skinner 2002, 37

<sup>18</sup> Ihalainen 2017b, 40-41; Palonen 2012, 61-67

it by an audience in a unique societal context, politicians have to formulate their arguments mindful of conventions in order to influence the audience's beliefs and opinions and thus have it to act in the desired way – which is, indeed, the ultimate goal of the parliamentary debate.<sup>19</sup> In the debate, through the careful use of language and rhetoric, the debaters who have to at least neutralize the argumentative positions of their opponents both delimit and construct political alternatives and politicize political concepts in an effort to affect the audience.<sup>20</sup> Roderick Hart defines the use of rhetoric in the debate as an activity that is aimed at delimiting the horizon of expectations by helping the audience to limit their choices among different policy alternatives.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Kari Palonen, Taru Haapala and Claudia Wiesner consider that the entire “political relevance of rhetoric lies precisely in the idea of finding alternatives.”<sup>22</sup> This process, in turn, is interactive and discursive.<sup>23</sup>

Parliamentary rhetoric based on arguing pro et contra, for and against items on the political agenda, consequently gives rise to differing and competing conceptualizations of reality.<sup>24</sup> When debating opinions and ideas and various policy alternatives, Ilie argues, politicians discursively problematize and reshape the prevailing conceptualizations of “values, identities and relationships” that are at the core of the decision-making process in an effort to try to affect the audience's beliefs and opinions.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, as Kari Palonen has noted, more interesting than the actual substance of contemporary policy-questions are often the questions related to the argumentative premises and commitments that precede the thematization of a certain issue and the rhetorical moves that the presentation of an argument necessitates in order it to gain acceptance among audience.<sup>26</sup> Although Congressional debates often contain long and prepared speeches, especially from the leaders who led the debate, spontaneity is a typical feature of parliamentary debates and speeches are often replies to the assertions from previous speakers.<sup>27</sup> Thus, without planning, the conceptualizations and rhetorical moves in the debate can emerge from the necessities created by a speaking situation.<sup>28</sup>

The line between the rhetorical and the conceptual is understood to be largely relative in this study. Concepts, as Skinner argues, should be seen as instruments of debate rather than statements about the world itself.<sup>29</sup> Thus, they are part of wider discursive struggles and their uses must be understood as

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<sup>19</sup> Ilie 2016, 134; Hart 1997, 46-51

<sup>20</sup> Palonen 2012, 61-63; Ilie 2016, 134; Wiesner & Haapala & Palonen 2017, 70-71

<sup>21</sup> Hart 1997, 2

<sup>22</sup> Wiesner & Haapala & Palonen 2017, 70

<sup>23</sup> Ilie 2010, 1; Ilie 2016, 134

<sup>24</sup> Ihalainen 2017b, 41

<sup>25</sup> Ilie 2016, 134

<sup>26</sup> Palonen 2012, 203

<sup>27</sup> see Wiesner & Haapala & Palonen 2017, 74

<sup>28</sup> see Ihalainen 2017b, 41

<sup>29</sup> Skinner 2002, 177

intentional moves in political discourse.<sup>30</sup> For him, not unlike the continental conceptual historians represented most notably by Reinhart Koselleck, concepts are important ideological elements in the political discourse as they not only regulate the political struggles but also qualify the beliefs and assessments of reality.<sup>31</sup> However, while Koselleck focuses on delineating larger diachronic semantic changes, Skinner emphasizes outlining the argumentative techniques employed in the use of concepts, thus paying attention to the synchronic elements in analyzing concepts.<sup>32</sup> Within the scope of this research, concepts have also been analyzed through synchronic comparisons within one community of language users, and the research interest has been on concepts as ideological weapons in political discourse – the definitions of which are caught in a process of constant semantic struggle. To understand the multilayered meanings inherent within concepts, I have outlined different uses of key concepts, their part in larger conceptual networks, and the role that they played in the political debate.

In sum, this research has been conducted through the close reading of primary sources and contextualizing them as far as possible and conducting both a textual and conceptual analyses of Congressional and press debates concerning the treaties of the Washington Conference in 1922, the ultimate aim being the reconstruction of competing and ideologically motivated conceptualizations of ideal approaches to international relations. What I have tried to avoid in this thesis is anachronism and teleological or normative interpretations of past argumentation. Rather, as a research of history of political discourse, the emphasis in this thesis is on contingency in studying past political action, and the consequent goal is to translate assumptions and beliefs from the past to the present without adding them anything or establishing abstractions which, in the light of primary sources themselves, are not justifiable.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, instead of focusing only on intellectual leaders or the actions of the foremost political actors, the scope of this study is on discursive processes within the political elite more broadly. Attention has consequently been paid to a variety of historical agents who, in interaction with each other, participated in the political discourse, which also contained numerous historical continuities and took place in spatially different forums (however the focus here is mainly on the national level, although various transnational links are considered).<sup>34</sup>

### **1.3 Previous Research**

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<sup>30</sup> Palonen 2017, 98-100

<sup>31</sup> Skinner 2002, 44-50, 159, 175-180

<sup>32</sup> Skinner 2002, 187

<sup>33</sup> see Hyrkkänen 2017, 62-63; Tully 1988, 38-45

<sup>34</sup> Halonen & Ihalainen & Saarinen 2015, 3-5; Ihalainen 2017a, 71-74

A significant body of literature is dedicated to studying interwar American internationalism from the prism of the fight over the membership in the League of Nations. Yet what this overwhelming focus on the League, and on the obvious partisan aspects related to the debate on the League membership at the turn of the 1920s, has often overshadowed is the study of the multifaceted nature of American internationalism itself in the interwar era. Instead of embracing “isolationism” after the First World War, political elites in the United States had differing and competing visions for the nature of postwar American engagement in international affairs, which are not reducible to simple analytical – and often anachronistic – dichotomies such as isolationism vs. internationalism. Rather, the political discourses concerning these issues reveal the complexity and multiplicity of views, which this study seeks to highlight by focusing on the Washington Conference. The League, though it occupied a central place in the postwar world order, was not regarded as the only way to approach international relations, and new research has been more recently published that discusses the varied views on internationalism.

Traditionally, as Lloyd E. Ambrosius has pointed out, the debate on the membership in the League at the turn of the 1920s has been conceptualized in terms of partisan politics. Adhering to the position of President Woodrow Wilson, several historians have understood the Republican opponents of the League as mere partisan players seeking to discredit the Democratic President, whereas the League has been regarded as one of the greatest contributions to international relations in history. Thus, the rejection of the membership in the League has frequently been perceived as a return to “isolationism” (a concept which, as has also been noted in this study, was not in common circulation after the war as it became a key concept only after the Second World War).<sup>35</sup> According to John Milton Cooper Jr., whose work on Wilson and the United States foreign policy debates in the 1910s is some of the most illuminating to date, the political field in the country coalesced around isolationist vs. internationalist positions during the war – which continued to the interwar period – as the questions of foreign policy were subjected to increasing partisan polarization.<sup>36</sup> John Chalmers Vinson has also seen American foreign policy in the 1920s as characterized by the contrasting demands of world leadership on one hand, and the desire to return to normalcy in the form of a policy of isolation, on the other<sup>37</sup>.

Yet, as has been increasingly noted in the research of postwar American internationalism, Wilsonian internationalism did not embody monolithic thinking on international relations in the United States at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as opposed to traditional isolationism. In fact, as Ambrosius points

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<sup>35</sup> Ambrosius, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 59, No. 2, (1972) pp. 341

<sup>36</sup> see Cooper Jr. 1969, *The Vanity of Power. American Isolationism and the First World, 1914-1917*, and Cooper Jr. 2001, *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations*.

<sup>37</sup> Vinson, *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 39, No. 2, (1952) pp. 313-314

out, the historical research on the interwar period that quickly followed the Second World War often ignored the positive alternatives put forward by many prominent Republicans at the place of Wilson's League in favor of interpretations that underlined the partisan aspects of the issue and the theme of returning to isolationism after the Senate's rejection of League membership. As he has revealed, many prominent Republican politicians advocated the maintenance of the wartime coalition as a basis for the organization of international relations after the war, and they often expressed concerns regarding the security of France.<sup>38</sup> And, as Thomas Knock and Stephen Wertheim have more recently discussed, only a few Republicans promoted a foreign policy that amounted to isolationism neither during the war nor the immediate postwar years. Instead, in wartime debates on the postwar world order, two different and competing internationalist visions appear to have existed; one that eventually coalesced around Wilson, and another championed by leading Republican foreign policy authorities.

Because the Washington Conference was organized in 1921, three years after the war had ended and two years after the Senate had voted against the membership in the League, it has been crucial to this study to delineate the political discourses that preceded the conference. In fact, as the League formed a key tenet of the postwar world order, it would be impossible to reconstruct contemporary views on international relations without understanding the dynamics involved in the debate over membership of the League and the wartime developments that preceded the debate. In this regard, works from Wertheim, Knock, and Cooper Jr. have been of enormous value. In his seminal work, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (1992), Knock has paid attention to the development of Wilsonian or progressive internationalism as opposed to the concomitant rise of the conservative one in the 1910s. Wilson, according to Knock, was influenced by the visions of the progressive peace movements for postwar peace during the war, which Wilson subsequently adopted in the drafting of the League Covenant and which differed greatly from those advocated by leading conservatives. The following disagreements, along with the simultaneous rise of increasing partisan polarization in the late 1910s, had a significant influence on the debate over the League membership and its subsequent rejection in 1919-1920.

In contrast to Knock, whose research interest is mainly on delineating the development of Wilsonian internationalism on the basis of political discourses within the American Left, Wertheim has paid attention to the visions for a postwar international organization – or a league of nations – put forward by the Republicans in the 1910s. In his articles, *The League of Nations: a Retreat from International Law?* (2012) and *The League That Wasn't: American Designs for a Legalist-Sanctionist League of*

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<sup>38</sup> Ambrosius, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 59, No. 2, (1972) pp. 341

*Nations and the Intellectual Origins of International Organization, 1914–1920* (2011), Wertheim has reconstructed the competing visions for a league: one based on the organicist understanding of political development championed by Wilson, who saw the new international organization primarily as a mean to develop the spirit of internationalism, and the other advocated by leading Republicans, which was based both on legalist mechanisms and the codification of international law. Legalism, as Wertheim notes, had been advocated by the consecutive Republican administrations since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, played a key role in the thinking among the most prominent Republican intellectuals. Thus, he argues, if the League would had been drafted on the basis of legalistic plans, it is likely that the United States would have joined the organization.<sup>39</sup>

Although the debate over membership in the League drowned out the alternatives, as a result of which the legalistic vision was left largely undiscussed,<sup>40</sup> legalism played a key role in the political discourse in the interwar period because it was supported by some of the most influential figures in public life. In the work edited by Molly Cochran and Cornelia Navari, *Progressivism and US Foreign Policy Between the World Wars* (2017), authors have outlined the development of American internationalism in the interwar era by examining the works of the most prominent public intellectuals of the era. Many of these had close personal relationships with prominent Senators from both parties, and some had even been directly involved in the partisan fight over the membership in the League in the late 1910s. Perhaps the most prominent of these figures, who also had a key role in the negotiation of the treaties of the Washington Conference in 1921-1922 and in the guiding of United States foreign policy in the interwar era, was Elihu Root – the main theorist of the legalist approach to international relations in the country. As one of the main aims of their book, the authors have discussed the range of intellectual undercurrents that were related to progressive internationalism after Wilson, revealing the diversity of the views: While many on the American Left continued to adhere to the vision laid out by Wilson, many turned away from his thinking after the war in favor of legalistic solutions to wars and the advancement of democracy in conducting diplomacy. These are major themes in this thesis as well.

The abundant research on Anglophone internationalism has also been crucial in the contextualization of the various ideological undercurrents that defined interwar American and British internationalisms. These were originated from the wartime debates that gave rise to liberal visions for a new international order based on democratized foreign policy and the power of informed international public opinion to influence politicians. In this regard, the works from Helen McCarthy, *The British people and the League of Nations: democracy, citizenship and internationalism, c. 1918-45* (2011), from E.H. Carr,

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<sup>39</sup> Wertheim, *Diplomatic History* Vol. 35, No.5 (2011), pp. 798-802, 822-832

<sup>40</sup> Wertheim, *Diplomatic History* Vol. 35, No.5 (2011), pp. 798-802, 822-832

*The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939* (2016), and Peter Yearwood, *Guarantee of Peace: The League of Nations in British Policy 1914-1925* (2009), have provided vital tools for analysis. In their research, Pasi Ihalainen and Antero Holmila have also discussed postwar British visions for peace after both world wars by performing a conceptual analysis of the debates within the British Parliament and the press.<sup>41</sup> Recent research on interwar internationalism has increasingly challenged the traditionally dominant focus on nation-states and socialist views on internationalism, which has often obscured the varied contemporary non-socialist understandings of internationalism. New historical research on the subject has focused more closely on transnational aspects and a variety of contemporary views on “good internationalism.”<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, due to the fact that the focus in this study is often on the microlevel actions of individual Senators, biographical histories have played an important role in the contextualization. Because the political leaders at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century lived in an era marked by numerous transformational societal changes, including globalization and the transition to industrialism, a large body of literature has explored the actions of individual political decision-makers of the era. In this study, the important biographies of notable Senators in the early 1920s include William Widenor's study of Senate Republican leader Henry Cabot Lodge in *Henry Cabot Lodge and the Search for an American Foreign Policy* (1980) and the several works on Republican Senator William Borah who was, arguably, among the most important political leaders of the interwar period. In an article, *William E. Borah, Political Thespian* (1965), John Milton Cooper Jr. has provided a valuable overview of his political philosophy. His extensive research on the debate on the League membership in *Breaking the Heart of the World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations* (2001) has provided an important basis for delineating the development of views among Senators who, only three years earlier, had assented to League membership.

Also, as one has to start with two major political parties and their factionalized structures in order to understand American politics at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this thesis relies heavily on the research concerning the party politics of the early 1920s. These include Karen Miller's *Populist Nationalism: Republican Insurgency and American Foreign Policy Making, 1918-1925* (1999) and *After Wilson: The Struggle for the Democratic Party, 1920-1934* (1992) by Douglas Craig. While Miller focuses on intraparty politics within the Republican party and the personal dynamics between Republican leaders at the turn of the 1920s, Craig has focused on the intraparty struggles within the Democratic party after Wilson's presidency. These provide an essential framework through which to

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<sup>41</sup> see Holmila & Ihalainen, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* Vol. 13, No.2 (2018), pp 25-53

<sup>42</sup> see Ihalainen & Leonhard 2021; Ihalainen, *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, Vol. 39 No.1 (2019) pp. 11-31

understand the debate on the treaties of the Washington Conference, which, in addition to ideological differences, contained a major partisan aspect. The politics of the 1920s have been widely regarded as the peak of conservative dominance in American history as the progressive left, after two decades of reform policies, was excluded from power. This, in turn, created its own political dynamic, which has to be taken into account.

## **1.4 Background to the Washington Conference**

### **1.4.1 Political Parties at the beginning of the 1920s**

From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency in the early 1930s, the Republican party was the clear majority party. Before President Woodrow Wilson, whose victory in the 1912 election was largely a result of the fragmentation of the Republican party, the Democratic party had only succeeded in winning the White House twice since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century under Grover Cleveland's leadership.<sup>43</sup> However, the two parties can hardly be viewed as coherent or ideologically definable units – especially, in terms of foreign policy, which only gained prominence in the political discourse as a result of the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.<sup>44</sup> Rather, the parties in the early 1920s have to be viewed as deeply factionalized and ideologically diverse political units. As a result of this factionalism, policies that the parties promoted originated from intraparty negotiations. Thus, despite its position as a clear majority party in the 1920s, the consecutive Republican administrations during that decade had to negotiate their policies carefully with regard to the minority factions within the party. Without their support, the Republicans risked losing the elections to the Democratic party, which was no less divided.<sup>45</sup>

The contemporary American party system had its roots in the Civil War and in the subsequent party realignment that occurred in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, which was reflected in the partisan coalitions in the early 1920s. While the Democratic party was largely the party of the rural population in the West and South, as a result of which it was often maligned as the party of those who had supported the rebel cause in the war, the Republican strongholds were in the East and Midwest – in the areas that were at the forefront in the fight against the Confederation. The regional antagonisms resulting from the war benefited the Republicans as the Midwestern agrarians, despite the party's promotion of

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<sup>43</sup> Jenner 2011, 23

<sup>44</sup> Cooper Jr. The Pacific Northwest Quarterly Vol. 56, no. 4 (1965), pp. 150

<sup>45</sup> for an overview see Jenner 2011, 32-36

domestic policies that stressed the needs of industrialism rather than agrarianism, remained loyal to the party until the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt, who succeeded in unifying the American Left and agrarians under the Democratic party in the 1930s. Yet, while the divisions within the Republican party were largely regional, the divisions within the Democratic party were typically cultural as the party drew support from socially conservative and economically populist agrarian areas in the South and West on one hand, and from liberal and urban immigrant centers in the East, on the other.<sup>46</sup>

The emergence of the Progressive movement at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century upset the party coalitions and it challenged the traditional principles of governance based on minimal government involvement in the political economy. In origins, progressivism was a Protestant revivalist movement that rejected the prevalent social Darwinism of the time and called for social responsibility and economic reforms. As a political movement, Progressivism emerged into the political scene at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century under the sponsorship of Republican President Theodore Roosevelt. Based on the ideas of “scientific governance” and the promotion of a form of social democracy as in Europe, many progressives such as Roosevelt saw progressivism as a solution to problems originating from the disparate multi-ethnic immigrant society and as a cure for the social ills of poverty, violence, racism, and class conflict. The progressive reform program championed by Roosevelt – which effectively expanded the public sector – was aimed at the middle-classes, as it sought to curtail the left radicalism of organized labor on one hand, and the power of big business and plutocrats, on the other. While the Progressive movement had its political origins within the Republican party, it became closely associated with the Democratic party as President Wilson pushed through ambitious domestic reform legislation in Congress in the 1910s. However, it was only in the 1930s when progressives unified behind the Democratic party.<sup>47</sup>

As a bipartisan movement, the emergence of Progressivism factionalized both parties ideologically thereby laying the basis for bitter intraparty disputes that even overshadowed interparty antagonisms. Within the Republican party, the hostilities between the conservative party leadership that held power in Congress and the progressive minority faction culminated in the 1912 presidential elections when Theodore Roosevelt launched a third-party candidacy with the support of many progressives. He thus challenged incumbent Republican President William Howard Taft who had backed the Congressional party leadership in stifling the progressive legislative agenda in Congress. As the Republican voters were divided between Roosevelt and Taft, Wilson succeeded in winning the White House as the first Democratic candidate since Grover Cleveland. However, because of the ideological diversity within the Progressive movement itself, which had its own left-right and agrarian-urban divisions, President

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<sup>46</sup> Jenner 2011, 23-29

<sup>47</sup> Cochran & Navari 2017, 2-10

Wilson could not bring the Republican voters to the party – nor was he committed to doing so. As he legislated only through the Democratic party, many Republican progressives were alienated by his uncompromising leadership, perceiving him as despotic. The growing partisan divide between the Progressive movement then enabled the Republicans to reunify.<sup>48</sup>

In the 1910s, under the new leadership of Senate Republican leader Henry Cabot Lodge (R-MA), the Republican party succeeded in uniting its ranks against the Democratic administration. After the 1912 bolt, as Karen Miller notes, the new conservative leadership of the Republican party was committed to preventing another such fragmentation, and it tried to negotiate the ideological differences within factions carefully. New intraparty rules improved the opportunities for minority factions to voice their dissent and the Republican leaders allowed the insurgent progressives to remain largely unpunished. In addition, as Wilson's progressive reform agenda seemed to have been directed at the urban middle-class professionals, many agrarian progressives within the Republican party became antagonistic to his personal and political leadership. As the opposition to Wilson was centered on the areas of foreign relations in the course of the 1910s, the party did not have to confront the administration's progressive reform agenda, which enjoyed support among many progressives. Thus, under the leadership of Lodge, whose priority was to uphold the unity of the party, the Republicans managed to unite the party coalition. This unification played a key role in Wilson's failure to persuade the country enter the League of Nations at the end of the decade.<sup>49</sup>

As the Republicans managed to retain their electoral coalition in the late 1910s, while the Democrats lost the support of many on the political Left due to the wartime civil rights violations and the punitive peace terms imposed on Germany after the First World War, the party achieved the majorities in both houses of Congress and the presidency in 1920. As a result of the electoral defeats, accompanied by diminishing support in the West, the Democratic party became ever more divided along cultural lines because it was increasingly more dependent on the support of urban immigrant communities in the East. In the context of an upsurge of nativism and the resurgence of Ku Klux Klan, which followed the United States intervention into the war, the unification of its East-South coalition was difficult.<sup>50</sup> However, in order to maintain its support among the western agrarians, who were widely supportive of nationalist anti-League foreign policy, the Republican leadership had to negotiate its policy agenda as a compromise. In the areas of foreign affairs, the Republican party adopted an anti-League stance,

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<sup>48</sup> Miller 1999, 1-13

<sup>49</sup> Miller 1999, 10-14, 23-42

<sup>50</sup> Craig 1992, 25-29, 60-61; Cochran & Navari 2017, 8-12

and it incorporated the leading progressives into the decision-making process.<sup>51</sup> This compromise-oriented approach characterized the policy-making of the Republican leaders in the 1920s.

### **1.4.2 Overview of American Diplomacy After the First World War**

The Versailles Treaty, negotiated after the Allies triumphed over the Central Powers in 1919, did not stabilize the world order that had been torn apart by the First World War. In many parts of Europe, most notably in Russia, the end of the interstate conflict had only given way to civil wars that lasted until the early 1920s. Outbreaks of violence also occurred outside of Europe in the forms of colonial uprisings and their subsequent repressions. In the Near East, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire paved the way for a wave of ethnic violence and interstate rivalry over territory. In addition, unlike after the Second World War, Germany retained much of its great power status after the war, and it sought to revise the terms of the Versailles Treaty that had diminished its territory and imposed severe reparations. This furthered Franco-German tensions and strengthening its security against Germany was the main objective of French policy in the interwar era. With many problems left unresolved, as Jörn Leonhard has noted, the Paris treaty system the Versailles Treaty at its heart had merely created a loose framework for a new world system, and in the 1920s it was often modified from the periphery – while not being discarded.<sup>52</sup>

After the war, the United States had risen to a newfound position of international leadership. While European great powers were weakened by the war, and some, such as the Austria-Hungarian Empire were dissolved, the United States along with Japan witnessed the rise of its global influence after the war. Much of this was due to the new economic realities that benefited the country relative to the other great powers. Specifically, as a result of the war, the center of the world economy and finance moved to the United States which became the new leading creditor nation in the world. Britain and France, on the other hand, due to wartime loans, were relegated to the positions of debtors in relation to the United States. This, in turn, altered the balance of power in transatlantic relations in America's favor. Indeed, the economies in Europe were largely focused on managing the war debts in the 1920s that the United States refused to nullify. This refusal made the nullification of reparations regarding Germany impossible, which complicated European politics. The United States' global leadership was

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<sup>51</sup> Miller 1999, 92-99

<sup>52</sup> Leonhard 2018, 837-844, 862-873

further accentuated by the widespread demoralization in Europe after the war, and the consequent rise of American cultural and moral influence as it was seen as a model country in the continent.<sup>53</sup>

When the Warren Harding administration succeeded Wilson in 1920, its diplomatic approach was based on the advancement of economic development as a way to alleviate postwar conditions, and the administration used its economic influence to impose its decisions. Thus, even though it refused to join the League of Nations, even with modifications due to the opposition within the Republican party, the unity of which was its priority, the administration was committed to peace and sought to remove the impediments to trade and investment by having Europeans balance their budgets, adopt the gold standard, and reduce protectionism. These aims were especially crucial for the administration as the American economy became increasingly more export-driven after the war and also suffered from surplus production.<sup>54</sup> Under the Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover, who later in the decade was elected as President, the United States promoted private loans and investments seeking, as George Herring has argued, to advance the recovery of Europe without formal commitments. The key element in these efforts to advance the postwar recovery was the promotion of disarmament that would enable the balancing of budgets, the lowering of taxes, and improved environments for private investments.<sup>55</sup>

The armament race had not ended after the war and for many contemporaries on both sides of the Atlantic it appeared to be one of the most disconcerting problems facing the postwar world. Not only did it hinder postwar economic growth, but it was also seen as an incentive for new wars. In fact, after the war, the widespread view existed that the prewar amassment of armaments had been among the most crucial factors in causing the war in 1914, as it had increased global uncertainty. Moreover, as the war had given rise to new innovations in weapons technology such as submarines, tanks, long-range artilleries, and poisonous gases that had brought the war closer to civilian populations, it was considered crucial to effect disarmament measures in order to secure peace and to prevent even worse calamities in the future. Disarmament was thus included as one of the most central aims of the League: Under Article XIII of its Covenant, the League sought to reduce armaments “to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.” However, because of the lack of enforceable mechanisms, the League could not impose disarmament and the League Council could only make recommendations.

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<sup>53</sup> Costigliola 1984, 26, 40, 54-55, 76-81; Holmila & Roitto 2018, 76-82

<sup>54</sup> Costigliola 1984, 58-76

<sup>55</sup> Herring 2008, 445-452

The problems were also in practical politics: While Britain considered a strong navy to be vital to the protection of its Empire, France was concerned with the threat posed by Germany on land.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to the arms competition, the deteriorating relationship between the United States and Japan was among the most urgent problems threatening international stability and the security of the United States at the beginning of the 1920s. The tensions between the two countries originated from Japanese expansionism in East Asia. As Japan sought to establish its own sphere of influence in the region, expanding into the territories of China through Manchuria and Russia through Siberia, it infringed on the interests of the United States which, under its long-standing Open Door policy, sought to equalize the rights of foreigners in China and to fortify its sovereignty. For Japan, the economic expansion of the United States into the region posed a threat to its national aspirations and caused resentment. In addition, the tensions had also arisen over the race question. On the international stage, Japan had long advocated racial equality, which had encountered strong resistance from the Western powers, including the United States and angered the Japanese. These sentiments were further exacerbated by the discriminatory laws against the Japanese-Americans in many of the western states in the United States that were regarded as insulting to the Japanese in general.<sup>57</sup>

The aim of the 1921-1922 Washington Conference was to eliminate the potential for war arising from the instability in East Asia on one hand and from the armament competition, on the other, and thus remove the global problems left unresolved in the Versailles Treaty. In the conference, the Harding administration was successful in initiating the first disarmament measures following the war by having the five greatest naval powers in the world – the United States, Britain, Japan, Italy, and France – agree to naval armament limitations. Acknowledging the fact that it could no longer compete with the United States militarily, Britain agreed to naval parity with the United States in terms of capital ships; hence a 5-5-3 ratio was established between the United States, Britain, and Japan, respectively. As the United States and Britain agreed to uphold the status quo in the Pacific and East Asian regions in terms of military fortifications, Japan agreed to a position of inferiority. Though submarines were excluded from the treaty due to France's security concerns, the delegate countries agreed not to use submarines against civilian vessels in a separate treaty. However, although the conference ended the competition with regard to capital ships, it did not prevent great powers to compete with other forms of naval vessels such as submarines. Nonetheless, it was hoped the treaties would alleviate tensions and reduce wasteful defense spending.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Henig 2010, 44-45, 108-113

<sup>57</sup> Dukes 2004, 7-18; Herring 2008, 421-422

<sup>58</sup> Dukes 2004, 27-32; Herring 2008, 454,455; Costigliola 1984,81-87

Despite the widespread acclaim that the treaty on naval armament limitation received, the treaties related to the East Asian problems had arguably more far-reaching consequences as they effectively stabilized the great power competition in the region and postponed conflicts. By applying pressure to both Britain and Japan, the United States was successful in replacing the disconcerting Anglo-Japanese alliance with a general security arrangement in the Pacific – the Four-Power Treaty. Through the treaty, the contracting parties – the United States, Britain, Japan, and France – agreed to respect their territorial possessions in the Pacific and to refrain from aggressions in the case of a regional crisis. The Nine-Power Treaty, on the other hand, strengthened the Open Door policy. Through that treaty, the parties (also including Italy, Belgium, Portugal, and the Netherlands) agreed to respect China’s territorial integrity and national sovereignty, while Japan also returned some of China’s occupied territories. Although these were later accused of lacking enforceable commitments, which could have altered the disastrous events of the 1930s, the Senate would not have agreed to such obligations. Ultimately, the treaties improved the prevailing great power rivalry in East Asia.<sup>59</sup>

Overall, as is discussed in the following chapters, the conference embodied the Republican approach to foreign relations, striking a balance between contrasting demands. On one hand, the country was not ready to give up its long-standing foreign policy traditions, which dated back to the founding of the United States in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and had remained unchallenged until the outbreak of First World War in 1914. As Christopher Nichols points out, these included the speeches from Presidents George Washington and Thomas Jefferson who urged the young nation to remain neutral in foreign relations and to steer clear of European great power politics, and from President James Monroe who asserted that the Western Hemisphere belonged to the American sphere of influence.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, however, the country was compelled by the global instabilities and increasing globalization to take active measures to create peace. While the path laid out by Wilson was not an alternative, what remained was the limited form of internationalism in favor of which the Republicans argued in the debate over the treaties at the conference in 1922.

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<sup>59</sup> Dukes 2004, 35-41; Herring 2008, 454,456

<sup>60</sup> Nichols 2011, 3-5

## **2. Difficult Synthesis of Internationalism and Nationalism**

After the Republican-controlled Senate rejected the League of Nations membership in 1919-1920, the American stance on postwar international relations was ambiguous for many. Though it was clear that the newly elected Republican administration could not reintroduce the League membership with modifications, it was equally clear that the United States could not continue its traditional policy of aloofness from international affairs, because – in an increasingly globalized world – national interests merged with international ones. The Washington Conference organized in 1921 appeared to provide an alternative to national isolation on one hand, and aspirational Wilsonian internationalism on the other. The Republicans put forward a viable, acceptable form of limited internationalism, which was inoffensive to nationalistic sentiments. Although the treaties of the conference provoked a backlash from the most nationalistic elements in the Senate, who favored the traditional foreign policy of strict neutrality and aloofness from foreign relations as envisioned by the Founding Fathers, they could not gather sufficient support to oppose the treaties, nor could they offer a constructive alternative. Instead, the balance of power in the political discourse had turned in favor of the internationalist Republicans.

### **2.1 The Rejection of Insular Nationalism: International Cooperation as a National Imperative**

At the beginning of the 1920s, only a minority of Senators – mainly within the Republican party – favored an insular type of nationalism. Largely as a result of the growing global interconnectedness, the political mainstream in both parties advocated increasing global cooperation as they regarded the policy of national isolation as unworkable and outdated in an interconnected world in which national interests merged with global stability. Yet, at the beginning of the 1920s, the concept of isolationism did not exist. Rather, the term “isolation” was used as a trope to describe the seeming state of national isolation after membership in the League of Nations was rejected in 1919. Thus, it was used in order to create a dichotomy between the seeming supporters of isolation and those who favored increasing international cooperation. For the Republicans, this was an electoral matter, too: Although the party could not afford to alienate its nationalist elements and hence fragment its electoral coalition, it also could not afford to be associated with those due to their position in the public discourse. However, the Washington Conference provided a viable solution: While it manifested the party’s dedication to global cooperation, it did not conflict with nationalist sentiments – unlike President Wilson’s League.

In the debate over League membership, the Republican opponents of the League recognized the need for active international cooperation to stabilize the challenging postwar conditions and to prevent another world war from occurring in the future. Consequently, there was a wide bipartisan consensus on rejecting a policy of non-involvement or isolation – the position which was pejoratively associated in the public discourse with the most nationalist elements within the Republican party who opposed League membership in any form. While the Republican leadership could not afford to alienate these Senators, it still sought to distance the mainstream of the party from its most ardent nationalists.<sup>61</sup> In fact, Senate Republican leader Henry Cabot Lodge (R-MA) criticized “all this talk about isolation” emanating from some of the opponents of the League, arguing that the United States would always continue to be the force for the “world’s peace.”<sup>62</sup> Most of the party, therefore, did support the League membership with reservations that would have prevented the ostensible infringements on national sovereignty. Wilson, however, rejected the modifications, which resulted in the Senate ultimately voting against the League membership and causing,<sup>63</sup> as the 1920 Republican platform accused the President, the United States to stand “discredited and friendless among the nations of the world.”<sup>64</sup>

The Democrats and pro-League liberals, on the other hand, associated all the opponents of the League with the most ardent critics within the Republican party, who were not opposed to the insular type of nationalism, and they consequently accused the Republicans of nullifying the League Covenant and dooming peace. President Wilson, in fact, stated to then-Senate Democratic leader Gilbert Hitchcock (D-NE) that he could not make the difference between “a nullifier and a mild-nullifier.” World peace, as Wilson saw it, dependent on the League, and the Republicans’ reservations, if approved, would have impeded its function.<sup>65</sup> When it became evident that the partisan deadlock would prevent the ratification of the League Covenant, as William Widenor has noted, the Democrats then stressed the partisan hostility on the part of the Republicans in contrast to the Democratic statesmanship.<sup>66</sup> This was visible in its 1920 platform, in which the party continued to criticize the Republicans for their “partisan envy and personal hatred” towards Wilson. The League, as the party asserted, was the reason why the country had joined the war in 1917, abandoning its “traditional isolation” and hoping that

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<sup>61</sup> Miller 1999, 69-70

<sup>62</sup> Cooper Jr. 2001, 135

<sup>63</sup> Miller 1999, 48-62, 74

<sup>64</sup> Republican Party Platform of 1920, 8. June 1920

<sup>65</sup> Knock 2019, 316-318

<sup>66</sup> Widenor 1980, 348

the creation of the League would eventually lead to lasting peace – a hope that the Republicans had betrayed.<sup>6768</sup>

As the Harding administration took office after Wilson's presidency in 1921, it attempted to re-engage with world affairs without the League. The League membership, which was unacceptable for some of the Republican party's key constituencies in the West, was taken off the table. The administration sought to keep its distance from the organization to avoid antagonizing the most nationalist elements within the party, which would not approve the League membership even with reservations. However, neither the administration nor the mainstream in the party wished to be identified as advocating a policy of isolation either. As Karen Miller points out, the administration was under pressure from the internationalists within the party to engage actively in world affairs and to produce its own alternative to Wilson's vision.<sup>69</sup> Thus, rather than non-engagement, the Harding administration tried to build on its predecessor's approach with qualifications: Without the League or provocative global obligations, the Republican administration tried to alleviate global conditions and to ease the postwar recovery through regional agreements and by having other countries – mainly in Europe – remove impediments to free trade and to balance their budgets through armament reductions. These efforts culminated in the Washington Conference, which was organized within Harding's first year in office.<sup>70</sup>

The Washington Conference was seen as a crucial advance in postwar foreign policy, ending the state of national isolation. In Washington, the Harding administration successfully negotiated international treaties that, on one hand, stabilized the great power rivalry in East Asia and the Pacific through the Four- and Nine-Power Treaties and, on the other, limited naval armaments between the five greatest naval powers in the world – the United States, Great Britain, Japan, Italy, and France through the Five-Power Treaty.<sup>71</sup> The New York Tribune, a Republican-affiliated newspaper, praised President Harding for ending “the Versailles Treaty deadlock” within his first year in office, thus bringing the country “again into helpful association with the rest of the world.”<sup>72</sup> Though the pro-League elements continued to see the League as the key to peace, they still welcomed the conference as a sign that the Republicans, as a pro-Democrat newspaper the New York World asserted, had become “committed to international cooperation.” This, then, was a “precedent for ending isolation” and an indication of

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<sup>67</sup> Democratic Party Platform of 1920, 28. June 1920

<sup>68</sup> The creation of a league, however, was first introduced to the Wilson administration by the British government seeking to involve the United States into the war and postwar European politics. At first the White House rebuffed this, but after the country entered the war, the creation of a league was included among the Allied war aims (Thompson, *International Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 1, [2010] pp. 30-34).

<sup>69</sup> Miller 1999, 91-98

<sup>70</sup> Costigliola 1984, 66-77; Hawley 1979, 61-63

<sup>71</sup> Herring 2008, 450-456

<sup>72</sup> NYTR, “The First Years” 4. March 1922

a more active American foreign policy in the future, bringing the country into closer cooperation with other nations.<sup>73</sup> In this way, the conference successfully readjusted the American approach to world affairs and answered the new imperatives arising from globalization.

Within the Senate, there was a bipartisan consensus that favored increasing international cooperation and ending the state of national isolation because, unlike in the past, the country was viewed as unable to continue its traditional insular policies in the modern era. As proponents such as Walter Edge (R-NJ) argued, the problems confronting the world were “more interlocking” and as a result the country could no longer manage these in the way it had “a hundred years ago” as some opponents appeared to wish.<sup>74</sup> Instead, due to this increasing interconnectedness and interdependency, adjustments to the traditional policies were imperative. The often-used illustration of this redundancy in relying on the country’s geographical distance from Europe and Asia to avoid wars was the American intervention into the First World War in 1917. When the war broke out in 1914, President Wilson declared that the nation would continue its traditional policy of neutrality as he sought to avoid the war. As a result of the sinking of the *Lusitania* and Germany’s approaches to Mexico, however, the United States was finally drawn into the conflict that the administration had tried to eschew. LeBaron Colt (R-RI) who, like Edge, was among the most internationalist Republicans in the Senate,<sup>75</sup> considered that the intervention had poignantly demonstrated the limits of the policy of aloofness in the modern era:

... to-day, broadly speaking, the New world and the Old World are one. The great lesson taught by the World War is that the United States, on the ground of self-protection, cannot stand aloof from the quarrels of other nations. Five-sixths of the human race were drawn into the World War, and that war demonstrated that a conflict between the great powers is not only a menace to America, but will involve us, because nations in time of war, on the ground of self-preservation, will disregard the rules of international law and the rights of neutral nation.<sup>76</sup>

Nevertheless, the perceived necessity to adjust the traditional foreign policy in favor of a more active and cooperative approach to world affairs did not imply a fundamental revision of old foreign policy axioms – that is, of the policies of neutrality, the avoidance of alliances, and the Monroe Doctrine. In fact, as the authority of the Founding Fathers can hardly be overstated, repudiating the old axioms would have been far outside of the political mainstream. Instead, the majority of Senators in both parties argued that increasing cooperation, as the nation’s long history in arbitration suggested, aligned with American traditions. As Harry New (R-IN) argued, the creation of peace constitutes “a fundamental principle of our foreign policy.” And, since the Washington Conference had successfully alleviated the difficult international conditions, New argued that the repudiation of its work would

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<sup>73</sup> NYW, “America to take more active part in world affairs” 25. March 1922; Lawrence, David

<sup>74</sup> Edge, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.21.1922, pp 4159

<sup>75</sup> Cooper Jr. 2001, 314, 348

<sup>76</sup> Colt, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 23.3.1922, pp 4308

have resulted in the rejection of the course inaugurated by “the immortal founders” and a breaking with the past.<sup>77</sup> The increasing global cooperation – without alliances, the losses of neutrality, or the violations of the Monroe Doctrine – was thus regarded as fully aligned with *the spirit* of traditional policies that put the emphasis on the country’s role in the world as that of a peace-building nation.

While the supporters stressed the importance of international cooperation and the rejection of national isolation, they carefully avoided invoking the ideologically charged concept of internationalism. The concept had begun to have negative connotations in the politically polarized climate surrounding the League membership debate in 1919. The Republican opponents often saw Wilson’s internationalism as a negation of nationalism or patriotism or even as a guise for left radicalism, which was supposedly being promoted by Wilson. A conservative Senate Republican leader, Lodge, indeed, argued that the League meant substituting “an international state for pure Americanism” and breaking away “from George Washington to (...) the sinister figure of Trotsky the champion of internationalism.”<sup>78</sup> These concerns about internationalism as a repudiation of nationalism or even a pretext for Moscow-inspired radicalism were not limited to the American Republicans. In Britain, for instance, the Conservative parliamentarians stirred up similar concerns about the Labour politicians as a result of which, as Pasi Ihalainen and Jörn Leonhard have pointed out, the Labour leaders were cautious, underscoring the patriotism of their party.<sup>79</sup> Similar to the American internationalists, the leading British pro-League advocates such as Lord Robert Cecil also avoided using the concept due to its negative connotations.<sup>80</sup>

Instead of invoking “internationalism,” the proponents argued in favor of increasing international cooperation in the form of the Washington Conference as a national project. Most Senators, even the nationalist Republicans who had opposed the League membership with strong reservations, saw *the right kind of patriotism* as harmonious with a common international cause. In other words, because national interests were not separable from global stability and peace, participation in international cooperation served the United States’ long-term interests, being as much a national as an international cause. Irving Lenroot (R-W), one of the most outspoken supporters of the work of the Washington Conference, even went so far as to question the patriotism of those who “desire complete isolation of the United States from the rest of the world.” These “isolationists,” who, Lenroot argued, were often “of German and Irish descent,” were motivated by ethnic antagonisms and warlike attitudes toward Britain in particular – a treaty-associate:<sup>81</sup> (...) there are some elements in the America who are not

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<sup>77</sup> New, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.6.1922, pp 3411

<sup>78</sup> Knock 2019, 288-289, 293, 318-319,

<sup>79</sup> Ihalainen & Leonhard 2021, 155-156

<sup>80</sup> Holmila & Ihalainen, Contributions to the History of Concepts Vol. 13, No.2 (2018), pp. 33

<sup>81</sup> Lenroot’s controversial fellow Wisconsin Senator Robert La Follette Sr. (R) who was among the leading critics had advocated for Irish Home Rule and he had a large German-American constituency (Thelen 1985, 144-145, 151)

thinking of America first or her welfare, who are not thinking of peace, but war.” Their victory over the treaties of the conference, he argued, would be “the Nation’s hour of peril” because this would have isolated the nation and doomed peace.<sup>82</sup> This, in turn, would have inevitably affected the security of the United States, too.

As core national interests merged with the common international good, the traditional understanding of international relations as defined by the interest-driven great power competition appeared to require a fundamental reevaluation. Instead of the traditional thinking that emphasized short-term national interests, the proponents spoke in favor of adopting a cooperative approach to world affairs in order to achieve peace – the fundamental national interest. Concerns regarding the seemingly outdated and destructive militaristic thinking that put the emphasis on geopolitical rivalry were indeed prevalent in the postwar years as it was seen as having caused the war. Lord Robert Cecil, one of the framers of the League Covenant, contended that without the elimination of what he termed “the jungle theory of international relations”, the creation of lasting postwar peace would be “hopeless.”<sup>83</sup> Similarly, while ultranationalists such as James Reed (D-MO) criticized the arms limitations as dangerously naïve by providing other nations with an undue advantage over the United States,<sup>84</sup> the majority of the Senators rejected this line of thinking as outdated. Senate minority leader Oscar Underwood (D-AL), who had served as part of the American delegation in Washington, called for the thinking of “the men of the old school” who believed that world affairs could “be governed only by force” to be rejected. Their cynicism and short-term views impeded the advance of common international interests:<sup>85</sup>

For my part, I believe the world is moving forward, not drifting backward, and that the moral forces of the world can join together in bonds of mutual understanding, where respect for each other, love of justice, and the determination to do what is right will be the governing forces that will bind men and nations in the future.<sup>86</sup>

Yet, while the majority of internationalists put the emphasis on international cooperation as a way to advance common international interests as a national cause, the Republicans whose nationalism was more jingoistic than insular incorporated the success of the conference into creating peace primarily within a nationalistic framework. The conference, that is, had attained results because of the country’s free and untangled position in foreign relations and it manifested the country’s national strength and independence. In the debate over the League membership, one of the key arguments of the nationalists such as Lodge was that, by committing the United States to maintain collective security globally, the

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<sup>82</sup> Lenroot, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.14.1922, pp 3847

<sup>83</sup> Holmila & Ihalainen, Contributions to the History of Concepts Vol. 13, No.2 (2018), pp. 32

<sup>84</sup> Reed, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.8.1922, pp 3555

<sup>85</sup> Underwood, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.11.1922, pp 4711

<sup>86</sup> Underwood, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.11.1922, pp 4711

League would consequently diminish the nation's independence and "destroy her power for good and endanger her very existence."<sup>87</sup> The world, Lodge believed, depended on the United States; a belief which, as Christopher Nichols notes, often reflected his racialist belief in the Anglo-Saxon superiority that had also fueled his imperialist ambitions.<sup>88</sup> Far from an isolationist, Lodge's assertive nationalism merged with his idealism:<sup>89</sup> The conference had led to the beginning of the "world's peace," because, as in the past, the United States had upheld its national "strength and complete independence."<sup>90</sup> The rejection of the work of the conference would have then meant renouncing the national strength that had led to the conference and its beneficial results in creating peace.

Despite the bipartisan consensus opposed to insular nationalism and the traditional ways of thinking about international relations, the two parties were far apart from each other on the question of what form the ensuing "internationalism" should take. The relationship to Wilson's legacy was the key factor, as the parties formulated their views largely in response to Wilson's vision of international relations. For the Republicans, Wilson's idealistic internationalism was a failure. The conference, according to Republicans, was a repudiation of Wilson's foreign policy because, unlike the League, the Republican administration had within its first year in office succeeded in improving the difficult international conditions. The League, in contrast, manifested the bureaucratic ineptitude associated with Wilson's policies writ large. The Democratic party, on the other hand, was in a difficult position after Wilson's presidency. Though still outwardly committed to his aspirational vision, the political centerground had moved toward the Republican party, which had successfully dissociated itself from its most fringe nationalist elements. This, in turn, compelled the Democrats to adjust their political positions and renounce the overt idealism often associated with the former President.

## **2.2 Pragmatic Republican Internationalism Versus Aspirational Wilsonian Idealism with the League of Nations at its Heart**

While both Wilsonian and Republican internationalists agreed that the United States must escape from its state of isolation and engage constructively in international affairs, there was little common ground between the two on how this engagement would ideally appear. After the bitter partisan fight

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<sup>87</sup> Lodge, U.S Congressional Record Vol.58, 8.12.1919, pp 3784

<sup>88</sup> Nichols 2011, 13-14

<sup>89</sup> Lodge, as Widenor notes, believed early on in his career that the United States must assume greater international duties and he thus argued in favor of bringing American influence and moral standing closer together. He preferred humanitarian interventions, and his jingoism often manifested as idealistic internationalism (Widenor 1980, 74-75)

<sup>90</sup> Lodge, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.8.1922, pp 3552

over membership to the League of Nations, it was nonetheless clear that the Wilsonian alternative the League at its heart was not a feasible route for the United States which, after the 1920 presidential elections, had unambiguously voted in favor of the Republican party, which was openly antagonistic to Wilson's League. The Washington Conference, organized by the recently elected administration, represented a third way between seemingly impractical Wilsonian internationalism on one hand and disastrous national isolation on the other. For the Republicans, it was a practical and effective model for future global engagements. As the country was moving away from the reformist and progressive atmosphere that had characterized the politics of the 1910s, the Democratic party – though not willing to disregard President Wilson's legacy – had to position itself differently. Unlike in the debate over the League membership, they had to move to the centerground that was defined by the Republicans.

In the debate over membership to the League of Nations in 1919, the Republican leaders positioned the party as supporting the middle-ground between the Senate's vocal anti-internationalist faction and President Wilson's version of a league. A year before the presidential elections, the leadership of the Republican party was forced to establish awkward unity between its internationalist majority on one hand, who largely recognized the urgent need for a postwar international organization committed to upholding international stability and the anti-internationalist minority on the other, who opposed the League membership in any form (these Senators often came from Midwestern rural areas vital to the party's coalition). However, as most Republicans were alarmed by the seemingly extreme and even dangerous league-obligations – especially Article X that set up an arrangement for collective security which, for many Republicans, meant the replacement of national sovereignty by a world alliance that committed the United States to defend other members of the League – the majority of the party were united behind reservations to safeguard national independence. The party, therefore, tried to strike a balance between what appeared to be two extremes: voting in favor of membership to the League or rejecting it in its entirety – both of which would have fragmented the party.<sup>91</sup>

The differences between the President and the Republican-controlled Senate originated not only from political expediency and intraparty compromises but also from larger ideological disagreements over “good internationalism”. Based on his view that the war was caused by militarism, secret diplomacy, and aggressive nationalism, Wilson proposed a vision of internationalism as the replacement for old destructive practices: During the war, Wilson, as Pasi Ihalainen and Jörn Leonhard have noted, argued in favor of a postwar order that would not resume traditional foreign policies but to a type of global internal policy under the auspices of a League, closing the gap between national and international

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<sup>91</sup> Miller 1999, 44-45, 57-69; Cooper Jr. 2001, 348, 363-364

interests. It would lay the basis for global change, providing collective security for all states large or small.<sup>92</sup> The Republicans, however, saw Wilson's internationalism as utopianism and as establishing the foundation for impossible expectations. Internationalism, Theodore Roosevelt (a vocal critic of Wilson's policies) argued, could not lead to the sacrifices of national interests in the name of abstract idealism without failures. Rather, "sound internationalism" had to be built on "sound nationalism" that would create an environment in which the actions of interest-driven nation-states would serve the common global good.<sup>93</sup> In Britain, too, there was hesitancy in subscribing to Wilson's idealism; instead, both Liberals and Conservatives alike were closer to Roosevelt's preferences.<sup>94</sup>

These conflicting visions of internationalism emerged in the League membership debate, culminating in the question of majority leader Lodge's reservations to the League Covenant – without which most Republican Senators refused to vote in favor of the membership in Wilson's League. Lodge, who despised Wilson (the feeling was known to be mutual) and who was convinced that the League contained elements of left radicalism, introduced reservations to the League Covenant that reflected the wartime debate on internationalism: If accepted, his reservations would have denied the League Council the abilities to restrict the United States' freedom of action – even to use military force – and to commit it to mutual defense (the League, however, had little authority over its members and the League Council, in which the United States would have been the fifth permanent member, required unanimous consent for its decisions). For Wilson, however, Article X on collective security that was at the center of the debate was imperative for peace and he viewed all changes to its content as a nullification of the League. He thus demanded the Senate either approve his League or reject it in its entirety. As the Republicans faced increasing pressure from the party's anti-internationalist wing and the Democrats from an uncompromising President, the Senate ultimately voted against League membership both with and without reservations.<sup>95</sup>

In November 1920 – after the Democrats had joined the anti-internationalists and voted against the League membership with reservations early in the same year, thus ending the debate – the Republicans' position was further vindicated by the voters themselves. The party swept into power in the Presidential elections, taking control of all the branches of the federal government.<sup>96</sup> Yet even though the Republican party had expressed its support for "an international association" without "the

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<sup>92</sup> Ihalainen & Leonhard 2021, 145-148

<sup>93</sup> Wertheim, *Diplomatic History* Vol. 35, No.5 (2011), pp. 799, 819-831

<sup>94</sup> Holmila & Ihalainen, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* Vol. 13, No.2 (2018), pp. 31-35

<sup>95</sup> Knock 2019, 288-295, 310-322; Sluga 2013, 48-50; Gould 2009, 64-70

<sup>96</sup> Gould 2009, 70-71

compromise of national independence” in its 1920 platform,<sup>97</sup> the Harding administration soon realized that it could not reintroduce the League membership to the Senate with reservations – not without fracturing the Republican coalition. The Senators who had opposed the League membership in any form – the so-called irreconcilables who, although a minority, often came from Midwestern states integral to the party’s electoral success – remained suspicious of the reservationists who occupied the central seats in the Republican administration. Hence, within his first year in office, President Harding was compelled to formally announce that the administration would not sign the Versailles Treaty and try to enter into the League. Instead, the United States signed separate peace treaties with Germany and other wartime belligerents, maintaining its distance from the League.<sup>98</sup>

Nevertheless, this did not mean disengagement from world affairs as the administration was pressured to provide its own constructive alternative to the League, but without antagonizing the Republicans who were hostile to engagements and global commitments that could endanger national sovereignty. As a result of widespread public demands for a disarmament conference, the Harding administration eventually organized the International Disarmament Conference in Washington in 1921. Rather than trying to cover wide-ranging global problems that were mostly centered in Europe, the administration focused on naval armament limitations and the stabilization of East Asian and the Pacific regions. The American delegation was successful in its efforts, and when the conference ended in 1922 its treaties stabilized the great power rivalry in East Asia and the Pacific through the Four- and the Nine-Power Treaties, which were a prerequisite for limiting naval armaments in the greatest naval powers in the world – the United States, Britain, Japan, Italy, and France – through the Five-Power Treaty.<sup>99</sup> For internationalist Republicans, in the debate over the treaties of the conference in March 1922, the conference provided a viable alternative to Wilson’s League.

For the internationalist Republicans who had supported League membership with reservations in 1919, the Washington Conference represented a practical model for future international engagements because its treaties stabilized the global conditions without containing the shortcomings of Wilson’s League. The League, as Porter McCumber (R-ND) argued, was excessively “top-heavy and required many reservations before it would be made acceptable to this country”. The treaties of the Washington Conference, on the other hand, “contain all that I contended for as of real value in the late Versailles treaty with none of its dangers which had to be eliminated. They contain everything that is necessary to prevent war among the signatory powers.”<sup>100</sup> In 1919, McCumber was the only Republican who

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<sup>97</sup> Republican party Platform of June 8, 1920

<sup>98</sup> Miller 1999, 91-121

<sup>99</sup> Herring 2008, 454-456

<sup>100</sup> McCumber, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.14.1922, pp 3837

had supported the League membership without reservations, and, as a result, Lodge had isolated him within the Senate Foreign Relations Committee – on which he was the second-ranking member.<sup>101</sup> Similarly, Vice President Calvin Coolidge, in a speech added to the Records by William Calder (R-NY), argued that the nation had clearly rejected the League and “any qualification or limitation on the privilege of refraining from all armed intervention in contentions between foreign countries which did not involve our own interests.”<sup>102</sup> The conference, through voluntary agreements, had succeeded where the League had failed and had ushered in “the beginning of a new era” in world affairs.<sup>103</sup>

These are accomplishments toward peace commensurate with the late accomplishments in war. They are results which mark off this conference as the beginning of a new era. For the first time powers great enough to control world action have voluntarily agreed to a limitation of armaments; voluntarily recognized the existence of a common purpose, a universal brotherhood, an all-pervading spirit of righteousness and of mutual obligations and responsibilities.<sup>104</sup>

Yet, as many Democratic Senators pointed out, the accomplishments of the conference were modest at best since the naval armament limitations did not include either aircraft carriers or submarines, and land weaponries were not even included as part of the negotiations. William King (D-UT), in fact, considered that the conference would ultimately result in “widespread disappointment” and the true hope for comprehensive disarmament remained with the League.<sup>105</sup> For the Republicans, however, the true success of the Washington Conference was relative to the fact that it provided – as Coolidge argued – a breakthrough for further advances; it launched a new era in international relations.<sup>106</sup> Frank Kellogg (R-MN) who, like McCumber, was among the most internationalist Republicans in Congress and whom Lodge had thus refused to appoint to the Foreign Relations Committee,<sup>107</sup> was skeptical of claims that the League that had “done nothing” for the cause of disarmament could have achieved more than the conference, which had taken “a step in the right direction”. Furthermore, if the President would have undertaken “a general disarmament of land and naval forces” in Washington as several Democratic Senators seemingly suggested, “he would not have succeeded”.<sup>108</sup>

The strong emphasis on a pragmatic if limited approach to world affairs concerned the other treaties of the conference, too, which stabilized the Pacific and East Asian regions. While the Democrats were dissatisfied with the fact that the Harding administration had restricted its agenda in the conference to cover only the Pacific and East Asian issues, Republicans such as Secretary of Commerce Herbert

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<sup>101</sup> Cooper Jr. 1969 116; Miller 1999, 43-44

<sup>102</sup> Calder, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.29.1922, pp 4720

<sup>103</sup> Calder, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.29.1922, pp 4723

<sup>104</sup> Calder, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.29.1922, pp 4723

<sup>105</sup> King, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.30.1922, pp 4767

<sup>106</sup> Calder, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.29.1922, pp 4723

<sup>107</sup> Cooper Jr. 1969, 94; Miller 1999, 43-44

<sup>108</sup> Kellogg, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.28.1922, pp 4698

Hoover underscored the importance of moderation and gradual improvements in achieving peace. Instead of a world conference trying to solve wide-ranging problems worldwide, Hoover in a speech quoted by the New York Times spoke in favor of gradually-minded diplomacy that aimed to achieve immediate outcomes: (...) “until the world has solved its overwhelming and urgent problems, the only certainty of definite and tangible steps lies in attempting a narrow group of problems by a limited number of nations most directly concerned in these problems.”<sup>109</sup> A regionally-oriented approach, in other words, was required to stabilize the world order. This was reportedly favored by Harding, too, who publicly introduced an idea of a series of conferences, including one focusing on European issues, on multiple occasions both during and after the Washington Conference.<sup>110</sup>

The pragmatism and effectiveness associated with “the conference-diplomacy” – that is, a regionally-minded approach to deal with a limited number of problems in open discussions in a conference – were based on the fact that this mechanism cut right through the most urgent problem in world affairs: The lack of effective mechanisms for creating mutual understanding between the great powers and their representatives. Due to its mechanism of enforcement under Article X, the League was regarded as unworkable. This reflected the classic liberal views of many conservative Republicans who – like many prewar era liberal internationalists who emphasized the significance of morality, rationality, and political progress in world affairs – were as skeptical of the institutional or formal regulation of transnational relations as they were of government interventions into domestic politics.<sup>111</sup> Instead, peace required that states *voluntarily* adhere to morality and justice in conducting foreign policy. The San Francisco Chronicle, in an article added to the Records by Samuel Shortridge (R-CA), disparaged Wilson’s efforts “to create elaborate machinery for producing a perfect world.” Peace, the Chronicle stated, required the renouncing of forcible mechanisms in favor of “a new world spirit;” the devotion to international mores: “No institutional machinery like the League of Nations can bring about world peace. No law can produce it. World peace, if it comes, will be born alone of a new world spirit.”<sup>112</sup>

The general anti-formalism, or skepticism towards the institutional regulation of foreign relations, intertwined with the domestic policy preferences of the small-government and pro-business policies of many of the conservative Republicans who, in the 1910s, had opposed Wilson’s progressive reforms, which supposedly exceeded the appropriate limits of the federal government. For the Republicans, Wilson’s League was a bureaucratic busybody; a utopian “world or- supergovernment” that stood in the way of a rational decentralized means of stabilizing world order. Walter Edge (R-

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<sup>109</sup> NYT, “Hoover champions Four-Power Treaty” 22. March 1922

<sup>110</sup> Krepon & Caldwell & Buckley 2016, 77

<sup>111</sup> Holbraad 2003, 38-41

<sup>112</sup> Shortridge, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.23.1922, pp 4332

NJ) who, before he entered into politics, had built a successful career in the private sector and during his lengthy political career had distinguished himself as a fiscal conservative whose main focus was on the economy and on the efficiency of the public sector,<sup>113</sup> argued that the success of the conference and the failure “on the part of the subdivisions or subcommittees of the League of Nations” to produce disarmament measures was due to the fact that the conference did not have to operate with “supergovernment or constitutions or covenants.” Rather, as delegates had “conferred as business men” in order to “to reach conclusions on any subject or any problem they have before them,” they had been successful.<sup>114</sup> This success, in turn, provided a model for a decentralized, pragmatic business-minded approach to the future. As the Chronicle considered:

With Harding’s method the gain is the new method of approach, the new spirit of friendly conference, the new necessity of fair play and give and take, the new attitude of mutuality and reciprocal understanding – in a word, the business method applied to international policies.<sup>115</sup>

Yet, in reality, the League was far from a world government that threatened national sovereignty with its forcible mechanisms. It, in fact, was founded on the same anti-formalistic reasoning that the Republicans themselves stressed: The framers of the League Covenant, including Wilson, underlined the importance of plasticity so that the League could organically progress to manifest the will of the arising global community. Matters seen as part of the national jurisdiction were excluded from the League’s purview and its obligations, rather than based on forcible commitments, were all subject to political expediency. Even Article X and its obligation to collective security to which Wilson had assigned supreme importance was not a clear forcible rule, but instead the Council would ultimately determine how it was implemented, requiring unanimous consent on the part of the League Council – in which the United States, if it had joined the League, would have been the fifth permanent member.<sup>116</sup> Instead of constituting a governing polity, the League was more of an intergovernmental forum dedicated to developing both the process of internationalization and transnational cooperation, which the Republicans had also placed at the forefront with regard to establishing peace.<sup>117</sup>

After Harding won the largest electoral landslide victory theretofore in the United States history, the tide turned against progressivism, and the Democratic party was forced to move to the conservative centerground as defined by the Republicans. In the 1920 elections, the Republicans had consolidated their support in the western states, being then an undisputed majority party. Thus, the Democratic party was even more dependent on strengthening its support in the ethnically diverse urban

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<sup>113</sup> Birkner, Linky & Mickulas 2014, 243-246

<sup>114</sup> Edge, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.29.1922, pp 4713

<sup>115</sup> Shortridge, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.23.1922, pp 4332

<sup>116</sup> Wertheim, Journal of Global History, Vol. 7, No.2 (2012), pp. 224-225

<sup>117</sup> Wertheim, Diplomatic History Vol. 35, No.5 (2011), pp. 822-824; Sluga 2013, 48-50

communities in the Northeast – without which it could not win nationally. These more conservative voters, however, had abandoned the party in 1920 due largely to the unpopularity of the League which intertwined with general anti-British sentiments. Thus, while the party was basing its electoral support on the East-South alignment, as Douglas Craig notes, a new conservative leadership group emerged that was much closer to the Republicans than the Wilsonian progressives, who had long dominated the intraparty politics within the party and who often came from the South. Their loss of prominence provoked intraparty strife, though not a change in intraparty dynamics until the 1930s.<sup>118</sup>

While staunch pro-League Democrats such as William King questioned the significance of the treaties of the conference to peace, seeing the inadequacy of the arms limitations as evidencing the need for “a world conference, a world League of Nations,”<sup>119</sup> the Democrats largely discarded the aspirational rhetoric regarding the League and welcomed gradualism. In the League membership debate, Wilson and his closest supporters had conceptualized the organization in aspirational terms as a harbinger of world peace. The question of League membership, as Wilson saw it, was one of good versus evil and thus a vote against it was for him a moral failure.<sup>120</sup> However, even during the 1920 election campaign, the conservative leadership had stepped back from this uncompromising rhetoric by expressing through the Democratic party platform support for reservations to the League Covenant, which would make “clearer or more specific the obligations of the United States to the league associates.”<sup>121</sup> The *New York Times*, the editorial board of which had strongly supported Wilson and his stance on the League in the 1910s,<sup>122</sup> rejected the aspirational sentiments as it acclaimed Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes for his “reasoned project” that had yielded immediate results: “His plan was idealism translated into tonnage and guns. There was no pretense of at once ushering in the millennium. If there had been the world would have been suspicious of it.”<sup>123</sup>

In sum, the Republican party had managed to take discursive control of “good internationalism” and provide its own vision for the future of international relations and postwar diplomacy as a rebuke to aspirational Wilsonian internationalism. The Harding administration, by trying to achieve less, had accomplished more, and it had introduced new ways to solve international problems. Peace, as many conservative Republicans saw it, was dependent not on collective security or any forcible institutional mechanisms but on an anti-formalist approach that focused on creating mutual understanding between

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<sup>118</sup> Craig 1992, 23-29

<sup>119</sup> King, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.30.1922, pp 4767

<sup>120</sup> Knock 2019, 313, 321; Price 2007, 33-35

<sup>121</sup> Democratic Party Platform of June 28. 1920

<sup>122</sup> Sassali 2015, 33-34

<sup>123</sup> NYT, “Practical idealism by treaty” 30 March 1922

countries through a business-like approach. Nonetheless, a large portion of the Republicans' success in defining the parameters for acceptable and rational international engagement was due to the unpopularity of Wilson, which had paved the way for the Republican party's dominance in national politics at the beginning of the 1920s. After the election defeats, the Democrats had to reevaluate the depth of their commitment to the League and the party, in fact, ceased to demand the immediate ratification of the Versailles Treaty in its 1924 platform. Instead, it called for a referendum on the League membership, arguably, as a way to bridge its intraparty divisions.<sup>124</sup> The political pendulum, therefore, had shifted in favor of the Republicans who defined the new political centerground.

While internationalists from both parties were supportive of the work of the Washington Conference, the movement toward ever-increasing international cooperation gave rise to intense opposition from anti-internationalists mainly within the Republican party. In contrast to the conservative mainstream of the party, these Senators were not interested in redefining a new course for American foreign policy after Wilson's presidency. Rather, their opposition to the League and the conference was based on the fact that these engagements drew the United States into closer cooperation with other states, thus contradicting the American foreign policy traditions that dated back to the country's founding. For most of these nationalists, the country was not compelled through any necessity to engage in foreign relations outside of the Western Hemisphere. The opposition, however, gained insufficient traction to be successful, and, although the leading influential figures of the former irreconcilable group still headed the opposition, most of these Senators supported the treaties, further evidencing the political success of the Harding administration in defining a new course for American foreign relations.

### **2.3 Protecting a Shining City Upon a Hill – Rejections of Internationalism Between Left Anti-Internationalism and Agrarian Ultra-Nationalism**

Although both parties were controlled by their internationalist factions at the beginning of the 1920s, anti-internationalism nonetheless had a notable presence in the party politics and the postwar political discourse in general. Following the debate over membership to the League of Nations in 1919, the anti-internationalist Senators considered that the United States was on an alarming trajectory. On one hand, internationalist forces within the society were regarded as needlessly entangling the country to affairs of other nations, hence increasing the risk of becoming involved in another war. On the other, the traditional foreign policy of aloofness from world affairs established by the Founding Fathers was

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<sup>124</sup> Democratic Party Platform of June 24, 1920

seen as being under systematic assault by internationalists from both parties. Internationalism was, in fact, viewed as a rather new and even alien phenomenon given that the country's foreign policy had remained relatively unaltered for decades before the war (before the 1910s, American foreign policy was focused on hemispheric affairs and advancing commercial relations).<sup>125</sup> This, in turn, gave rise to the traditionalist discourse and hostility toward internationalist projects, which were criticized for needlessly breaking from the policies that had long guaranteed peace and prosperity in the past.

However, although the anti-internationalist opposition to foreign entanglements consisted mostly of agrarian progressives from western and southern states who all adhered to the traditional policy, this movement was not an ideologically unified front. For most of these progressives, the main priority in diplomacy was to avoid becoming entangled in the affairs of other nations, because this supposedly had a harmful effect on the historic ability of the United States to lead the world through the power of its moral example and thus create peace between belligerent nations. In contrast to these more left-leaning Senators, the ultranationalists were unsympathetic to the concept of moral leadership. Instead, they argued in favor of the policy of aloofness mainly in terms of national interests. The United States, that is, was becoming overextended through internationalist policies, though it had little to no interests outside of the Western Hemisphere. The Monroe Doctrine, put into effect in 1823 by President James Monroe, provided the basis for the insularism that had long guaranteed peace in the region in the past. Yet ultranationalists comprised only a small minority in the Senate, while left anti-internationalism had maintained a strong presence in the public discourse dating back to the beginning of the 1910s

The left anti-internationalism coincided with the rise of progressive internationalism during the First World War. Yet the former preceded the latter as it was adopted by the Wilson administration during the first years of the conflict. While nationalists such as Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge (R-MA) urged the administration to adopt an assertive stance toward Germany, President Wilson and his Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan formulated both a popular and coherent vision for non-involvement based on moral leadership. The United States, that is, was best equipped to create peace and spread its liberal ideals as a neutral arbitrator not involved in amoral great power politics rather than by military force. Bryan, an eminent figure among the agrarian left progressivism and the most prominent defender of a pacifist foreign policy, intertwined the defense of the traditional policy of neutrality with a notion of the United States as a shining city upon a hill set apart from the rest of the world to which it had been ordained to offer moral guidance through its example. This contained an apparent Christian component: Bryan, like Wilson, was a devoted Protestant for whom – as John

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<sup>125</sup> Cooper Jr. 1969, 17-19, 54-56

Milton Cooper Jr. has noted – righteousness not necessarily peace was the main concern of American diplomacy and upholding the purity of the nation’s moral prestige was his main priority as a leading diplomat. The intervention, Bryan argued, would erode the nation’s historically high moral standing in the world, which resulted from its policy of neutrality and aloofness from great power politics.<sup>126</sup>

Though Wilson continued to affirm the country’s commitment to the traditional policy of neutrality and non-involvement during the first years of the war, ensuring his reelection in 1916, the sinking of the Lusitania and German approaches to Mexico eventually drove the United States into the conflict in 1917, and even many of the most ardent opponents of the war turned in favor of joining the Western Entente powers because national interests were seemingly at stake. While Secretary Bryan refrained from criticizing the President directly, he resigned in protest when the intervention became imminent. The use of force, according to him, would inevitably turn into imperialism and, although he eventually supported the League as an improvement to the old system of balance of power, he was doubtful of international organizations based on collective security.<sup>127</sup> Despite Bryan’s dissent, the progressives from both parties mostly rallied behind Wilson’s war-efforts. As the progressives held the balance of power in Congress, Wilson outlined a progressive internationalist vision for peace as he declared that the goal of the United States was to “make the world safe for democracy” and to create a liberal peace: Through its efforts in the war, the United States would have reformed the antiquated and imperialistic world system.<sup>128</sup>

However, by the time President Wilson introduced the Versailles Treaty and League membership to the Senate in 1919, the progressive wartime consensus had ended. An unbridgeable division began to develop between the Wilsonian progressives and the wartime pacifists and agrarian progressives, who continued to support the traditional foreign policy of aloofness. The differences largely centered on the question of whether the membership in the League amplified or weakened the country’s historically constructive role in the world as a peacemaker. The so-called irreconcilables led by William Borah (R-ID) saw Wilson’s League as a dangerous alliance, “a moral treason”, that provoked wars rather than prevented them.<sup>129</sup> For him, as Secretary Bryan had argued during the war, the United States derived its international strength from its moral power, which enabled it to build peace in world affairs. In other words, the irreconcilables such as Borah contended that the country’s independent and aloof international position was a means to an end and not end in itself. That end was to advance peace and American ideals, and eventually to build a more peaceful world system that more closely

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<sup>126</sup> Cooper Jr. 1969, 19-37, 54-57, 63-79, 186-190

<sup>127</sup> Cooper Jr. 1969, 77-103, 137; Cherny 2014, 161-163

<sup>128</sup> Cochran & Navari 2017, 2-10

<sup>129</sup> Cooper Jr. 2001, 19

reflected what were perceived as American ideals.<sup>130</sup> Ultimately, as Wilson lost the support of his political base, his ability to push the League membership through the Senate weakened irreparably.<sup>131</sup>

Despite the extensive support for the limitation of naval armament treaty, the left anti-internationalist Senators nevertheless viewed the Washington Conference as a failure in the debate over the treaties of the conference in March 1922 – three years after the Senate had rejected the League membership. The opposition centered around the Four-Power Treaty – consisting of Great Britain, France, Japan, and the United States – that was intended to remove the potential for war in the Pacific region. While Article I obligated the signatory nations to respect each other’s territorial integrity and to refrain from using armed force if an exigency arose in the Pacific (and, in the case of a crisis, the signatories were obligated to settle the issue through a joint conference if traditional diplomacy had failed), Article II committed the four signatory nations to openly communicate with each other in order to arrive at an understanding of “the most efficient measures to be taken” if an outside aggression were to occur.<sup>132</sup> Since the treaty established close political connections between the signatory nations if not an outright alliance, the left anti-internationalists viewed this as weakening the United States’ ability to offer the world its moral leadership provided by its traditionally aloof and neutral position on the international stage far removed from amoral European great power politics and imperialism – just like the League.

The left anti-internationalists founded their arguments in President George Washington’s Farewell Address in 1796. In his address, Washington had famously counseled his successors to adopt a realist stance to international relations and to choose “war or peace, as our interest, guided by justice, shall counsel.”<sup>133</sup> The left anti-internationalists construed Washington’s words as a complete denunciation of binding political arrangements because the ability to choose a correct course of action in a given situation on the basis of interests and morality required absolute aloofness from world affairs. William Borah who, as the leading opponent to increasing international engagement in the country,<sup>134</sup> led the opposition in the Senate, denounced “the whole scheme of political connections with foreign powers” as contrary to Washington’s vision.<sup>135</sup> Without its aloof position, Borah argued that the United States would be unable to judge situations from an impartial and impassionate standpoint as Washington had advised and be “on the side of morality and justice”.<sup>136</sup> By invoking Washington’s famous lines, Borah defended the traditional policy of aloofness against binding political agreements such as the

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<sup>130</sup> Toth, *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (1961), pp. 555-556

<sup>131</sup> Knock 2019, 307-311

<sup>132</sup> The Library of Congress, *Insular possessions and dominions in the Pacific (Four-Power Treaty)*

<sup>133</sup> Nichols 2011, 5

<sup>134</sup> Gould 2009, 76-80

<sup>135</sup> Borah, *U.S Congressional Record* Vol.62, 3.13.1922, pp 3792

<sup>136</sup> Borah, *U.S Congressional Record* Vol.62, 3.13.1922, pp 3796

Four-Power Treaty, which would bind the United States into consultations with other signatories in advance and exclude other nations if a crisis were to erupt in the Pacific region:

What I am contending for is the doctrine for which we have stood for 150 years, that when war come we will decide for ourselves, without any previous binding obligation, where justice, honor, and morality lie, and will go in on that side, if the interests of our country require us to go in at all.<sup>137</sup>

Borah's views on international relations closely reflected his own actions as a politician. Borah, as Cooper Jr. notes, was a fundamentally moralistic politician who, as he underscored the importance of deliberation and political sovereignty, often railed against the excesses of partisanship. Thus, he was careful to avoid commitments that might endanger his principles – trying to judge political problems as independently as possible.<sup>138</sup> Borah projected his personal role in politics and his moralistic outlook on politics in general onto international affairs, basing the authority of his views on the teachings of Washington. In other words, just as Borah condemned partisanship in domestic politics, he denounced rapprochements with other nations for clouding the country's moral judgment – against which George Washington had advised. Indeed, when Miles Poindexter (R-WA) challenged Borah by asking what he would recommend the United States do to alleviate the global conditions if it was not by entering into agreements with other countries, he highlighted his opposition to internationalist efforts through the concept of moral leadership – the country's ability to provide tacit moral guidance to the world, resulting from its aloof international position: (...) “I do not deem that it is the business of the United States to go about correcting the inequalities or injustices which affect other nations. By example, by counsel, or advice, if requested, by moral leadership, we can do much, but not by joining alliances.”<sup>139</sup>

For Borah, the moral leadership in favor of which he advocated did not necessarily mean passivity in international relations, although the policy of neutrality and aloofness from world affairs were central to it, but rather it enabled the United States to act as an “umpire of the world” and thus create peace between belligerents.<sup>140</sup> President Wilson, too, had considered these arguments in favor of the foreign policy of aloofness to be persuasive and, on the eve of the American entry into the war in 1917, he had privately expressed reservations whether the intervention would indeed erode the country's moral standing in the world, thus rendering it impossible for the United States to negotiate a just peace as a neutral nation and a moral leader. Wilson, not unlike Borah, derived his political views from his deep Protestant beliefs: As Cooper Jr. notes, Wilson appeared to draw an analogy between ideal Christian behavior and peace in international affairs as he equated the United States' role in the world with that

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<sup>137</sup> Borah, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.13.1922, pp 3796

<sup>138</sup> Cooper Jr. 1969, 138-141; Cooper Jr. *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* Vol. 56, no. 4 (1965), pp. 148-149

<sup>139</sup> Borah, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.18.1922, pp 4076

<sup>140</sup> Borah, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.13.1922, pp 3792

of an ideal Christian who tries to avoid sin and helps others to do the same.<sup>141</sup> Wilson subsequently used overt Christian arguments in favor of the League instead of the policy of strict neutrality (framing the question of League membership in terms of providence and of good versus evil), which resulted in caused annoyance and even ridicule among his critics both at home and abroad.<sup>142</sup>

Moreover, as the United States aligned itself with the largest empires in the world through the Four-Power Treaty, it was feared that this could result in the institutional subversion and erosion of the nation's liberal foundations. "The Republic", as Thomas Watson (D-GA) considered, could not "be the partner of imperialism without a reaction coming from the imperialism affecting democratic institutions and ideals in this country".<sup>143</sup> In the debate over the League membership, Borah had also invoked similar fears of foreign contamination and the subversion of democratic government. For him, democracy was more than a form of government – it was an ethical and spiritual disposition that was antithetical to the European empires, which would have corrupted it through the League.<sup>144</sup> The result of the Four-Power Treaty, similarly, was that the nation was binding itself into an "unnatural relationship" with empires, which, according to Robert La Follette Sr. (R-WI), necessitated that the United States "must surrender those principles of liberty and equality which are fundamentally obnoxious to the Empire of Japan and to establish which we fought two bloody wars with the British Empire."<sup>145</sup> David Walsh (D-MA) who, like Watson was a Democratic critic of Wilson's League,<sup>146</sup> also feared that the treaty would strengthen the "dangerous imperialistic germs" within American society that had already engendered interventions into the Philippines and Latin America.<sup>147</sup>

The ultranationalist opposition to the Washington Conference, conversely, was less concerned with its implications for the nation's moral leadership than to national interests. In this regard, the treaties were viewed as weakening the country's security interests and its strategic position vis-à-vis the other great powers in the Pacific and East Asia regions. James Reed (D-MO), who was arguably the most nationalist member of the Senate, accused the administration of being outmaneuvered by both the Japanese and British who, by having the United States agree to naval parity with Britain and to waive its right to fortify its Pacific island possessions via the treaty on limitation of naval armaments, had effectively seized "an overmastering advantage in every conflict taking place at a considerable

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<sup>141</sup> Cooper Jr. 1969, 190-195

<sup>142</sup> Holmila & Ihalainen, Contributions to the History of Concepts Vol. 13, No.2 (2018), pp. 31-32; Price 2007, 31-34

<sup>143</sup> Watson, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.21.1922, pp 4186-4187

<sup>144</sup> Cooper Jr. 2001, 265

<sup>145</sup> La Follette, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.22.1922, pp 4233

<sup>146</sup> Woodward 2016, 560-562; Flannagan Jr., The New England Quarterly, Vol. 41, No. 4 (1968), pp. 486-495

<sup>147</sup> Walsh, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.22.1922, pp 4254

distance from our shores.”<sup>148</sup> He therefore derided the naivety of “pacifists” who failed to anticipate the outbreak of world war and whose “beautiful sentences” could “not do away with the grim reality we must face.”<sup>149</sup> The emphasis on national strength was further amalgamated with traditionalism. Hiram Johnson (R-CA), who, throughout his career, advocated for a strong navy,<sup>150</sup> disparaged “the perfervid emotional appeals” used to propagandize the public and to justify “the surrender of patriotic, independent judgment.” Though he grudgingly accepted the parity with Britain, he could not accept the Four-Power Treaty, perceiving it as another attack by internationalists against the traditions that had long guaranteed the nation’s success:<sup>151</sup>

We see again the stage crowded with besiegers; the banners of internationalism proudly borne by those who cry a new era. Before them is the old national citadel of sympathy and helpfulness but of independence of action and freedom from entanglements, the old citadel under whose beneficent protection a Nation has grown from its uncertain small beginning to the richest and most powerful on earth.<sup>152</sup>

Instead of involving the United States in internationalist projects and trying to create a new era of peace, these Senators spoke in favor of the traditional policy of aloofness and prioritizing hemispheric affairs. The Monroe Doctrine, established by President James Monroe in 1823, set the parameters for international engagement, delimiting it to the Western Hemisphere. As a crucial part of the nation’s foreign policy traditions, the doctrine warned outside powers against intervening in the region, stating that the continent was part of the United States’ sphere of influence.<sup>153</sup> For Johnson, whose friend and former running-mate, Theodore Roosevelt, had issued a corollary to the doctrine in 1904, explicitly warning Europeans to stay out of the region,<sup>154</sup> the doctrine was central to justifying insular policy as the basis of peace in the region: It was “an American answer” to European alliances, keeping them out and thus securing peace.<sup>155</sup> This had also been his argument in the debate League membership, as he saw the League as needlessly drawing the country into the affairs of states outside of the Americas, which, in turn, increased the risk of becoming involved in new wars.<sup>156</sup> In the case of the Four-Power Treaty, Johnson argued that the country was in danger of becoming involved in a “race with another civilization,” referring to Japanese expansionism in East Asia.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Reed, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 12.16.1921, pp 437

<sup>149</sup> Reed, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.8.1922, pp 3555

<sup>150</sup> Greenbaum 2000, 106; Weatherson & Bochin 1995, 104, 155-156

<sup>151</sup> Johnson, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.13.1922, pp 3776

<sup>152</sup> Johnson, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.13.1922, pp 3776

<sup>153</sup> Nichols 2011, 5, 252-253

<sup>154</sup> Milne 2015, 78; Greenbaum 2000, 101; Thompson 2014, 352

<sup>155</sup> Johnson, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.13.1922, pp 3783

<sup>156</sup> Weatherson & Bochin 1995, 89-90

<sup>157</sup> Johnson, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.13.1922, pp 3782

Nonetheless the ultranationalist opposition to internationalism was outside of the political mainstream and it was overshadowed by the idealist left anti-internationalism represented most prominently by William Borah who, although supportive of Johnson's presidential bid in the 1920 primaries, did not share his militarist tendencies.<sup>158</sup> As the support for the policy of national isolation and arms increases was often associated with cynicism and irresponsibility, few wanted to be identified as supporters of it, and thus the idealistic opposition to internationalist schemes was more common. They challenged the fundamental premises of the supporters – that is, that the treaties of the conference had to be voted in favor of because of their positive effects on peace. Indeed, David Walsh criticized those “who cry chauvinism, selfishness, isolation” and who sought “detachment from the responsibility of helping to solve the problems of mankind.”<sup>159</sup> The United States, however, was in danger of losing its standing in the world as “the champions of the rights of small, weak nations, as the savior of democracy, as the promoters of international peace and justice” by aligning itself with imperialists via the Four-Power Treaty.<sup>160</sup> Peace, then, required adjustments mostly on the part of empires that had to renounce their methods of exploitation, while the United States provided the world with its tacit guidance.

However, the opposition to internationalism as represented by either Borah or Johnson was unable to offer a viable political alternative to the Harding administration's efforts, and the influence that they exerted was mainly negative. In other words, even though there was a clear understanding of what was an unacceptable form for international engagement, there was little ideological clarity, even on an individual level, of what was desirable, which impeded these Senators playing a constructive role in proposing an alternative. As a case in point, even though Borah could not accept the United States cooperating with the League, when questioned, neither was he opposed to its existence, as he welcomed its efforts in “relieving Europe of its armaments” and pacifying the continent.<sup>161</sup> What he favored was a conception of moral leadership that offered no roadmap for stabilizing the world order. These ambiguous and vague views reflect the newfound relevance of the question of foreign affairs in the political discourse of the early 1920s. Like many Americans, as Cooper Jr. notes, Borah had begun to coherently engage in these questions only after the outbreak of war in 1914.<sup>162</sup> Nonetheless, as is noted in the following chapter, this negative influence played a key role in limiting the nation's global obligations.

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<sup>158</sup> Miller 1999, 79-80; Greenbaum 2000, 105-106

<sup>159</sup> Walsh, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.22.1922, pp 4255

<sup>160</sup> Walsh, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.22.1922, pp 4254

<sup>161</sup> Borah, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.29.1922, pp 4705

<sup>162</sup> Cooper Jr. *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* Vol. 56, no. 4 (1965), pp. 150

### **3. National Sovereignty Versus Alliances**

Woodrow Wilson's polarizing presidency from 1912 to 1920 left a notable mark on partisan politics in the early 1920s. For the Republicans, Wilson's policies both in domestic and in international affairs were characterized by their unconstitutionality which, in the areas of international affairs, represented a disregard for national sovereignty and the prerogatives of Congress.<sup>163</sup> The League of Nations, and especially its obligation to collective security, conflicted with the Constitution that granted Congress the powers to decide on war and peace, according to Republicans. The Democrats, in contrast, were committed to Wilson's vision of postwar peace based on the importance of the League and its commitment to collective security, which dismantled the style of great power politics that had led to the First World War in 1914. Following the debate over membership to the League, two competing paradigms existed in the political discourse regarding appropriate international obligations: Whereas Republican Senators prioritized the principles of constitutionality (as defined by them) and national sovereignty in the debate over the treaties of the Washington Conference in 1922, rejecting all alliance structures that could impose commitments to mutual defense in violation of the powers of Congress, many Democrats remained committed to Wilson's vision. They favored universal and even forcible obligations to mutual defense in order to secure lasting peace.

#### **3.1 Constitutional Constraints for Transnational Obligations and Supranational Mechanisms**

Constitutional questions were a central – if not the most crucial – part of the debate on the treaties of the Washington Conference in 1922. In the debate over the League of Nations membership in 1919-1920, the Republican Senators had based their weightiest attacks against the League Covenant on its supposed violations of the Constitution and national sovereignty. For many Republican opponents of the League, the organization set up an arrangement that, if entered into, would have infringed on the prerogatives of Congress by transferring its constitutional powers to the League Council which could then decide on matters seen as part of the sole jurisdiction of Congress.<sup>164</sup> Similarly, the critics argued that the treaties of the Washington Conference infringed on the Constitution by constraining the powers of Congress in favor of the Executive and other signatory nations. This, in turn, was regarded

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<sup>163</sup> Wilson, though having an academic background as a Professor of political sciences, had indeed expressed reservations about the written Constitution, which reflected his organicist view of politics inspired by Edmund Burke, Walter Bagehot, and Hegel (Wertheim, *Diplomatic History* Vol. 35, No.5 [2011], pp. 828)

<sup>164</sup> Ross, *The American Journal of Legal History* Vol. 53, No.1 (2013), pp. 85-88

as a violation of national sovereignty. In the early 1920s, after having campaigned for constitutional decision-making both in foreign and domestic policies, these criticisms against the conference were particularly crucial for the Republicans, who were exposed to charges of hypocrisy. Consequently, these attacks required a sufficient and effective response.

Even before President Wilson introduced the League Covenant to the public, many of his Republican opponents considered that mere membership in an international organization that possessed any kind of independent authority represented a constitutional challenge. The terms of the League Covenant only exacerbated their reservations and increased their opposition. For many Republicans and legal scholars, as legal historian William G. Ross notes, sovereignty was fundamentally indivisible and as the League constituted a new supranational polity that had the indices of a sovereign state, it appeared paradoxical to be a member of the League without at least some compromises to national sovereignty. The League – though it lacked an independent military force or the power to tax – had its own courts, its own method of arbitration, and it even had a geographical presence insofar as it would supervise the administration of mandates and govern the regions of Saar and Danzig which were separated from Germany after the First World War. Indeed, for some of the opponents, the League was both a legal and political entity that was more than just the sum of its members and, as a result, membership in the organization had seemingly grave implications for the American system of government.<sup>165</sup>

The most disconcerting feature of the League, which truly appeared to turn it into a super-state, was Article X on collective security. While supporters saw the article as the most crucial part of the League Covenant that would ensure lasting peace in the future, opponents were concerned about its possible implications for the Constitution. Because the article was formulated as the “obligation” to respond to aggressive military action, opponents feared that it might undercut the prerogative of Congress to declare war: The article committed the United States, possibly contrary to the national interests and will of the public, to take up arms as a result of a decision by the League Council – conceivably, in uprisings or civil wars incited by the colonial oppression committed by the empires that sat in the Council. For Republicans such as Senate majority leader Henry Cabot Lodge (R-MA), the article was a clear threat to the country and the Constitution because it obligated the United States to preserve the territorial integrity and independence of “every nation on earth”. Consequently, the Republican party under the leadership of Lodge supported reservations in order to safeguard the war-making

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<sup>165</sup> Ross, *The American Journal of Legal History* Vol. 53, No.1 (2013), pp. 17-18

powers of Congress and national sovereignty. The President's opposition to any changes, however, ultimately led to the failure to modify and ratify the League Covenant.<sup>166</sup>

Most of the legal arguments and suspicions critical of the League, as Ross argues, were motivated by the desire to restore the traditional balance of power between the executive and legislative branches of government after many years of a strong Executive. During the war, President Wilson's policies had radically expanded the authority of the federal government as a result of which the Republicans had often denounced his actions as unconstitutional.<sup>167</sup> Many Republicans, in fact, warned against the centralization of power in the League, contending provocatively that it was a worldwide extension of the President's authoritarian wartime policies that had led to the suppression of civil rights such as the actions against freedom of speech and the imprisonment of antiwar activists. The debate over League membership, Ross notes, reflected the distrust in the President as many Republicans were not willing to grant an administration – and its representative in the League Council – the powers to make decisions on war and peace without the input of Congress. The Covenant required reservations that would make the constitutional boundaries between the Executive and the Legislator explicit and clear, and thus close the door to possible attacks against Congress if it was seen to be ignoring its treaty obligations if it rejected requests for joint military action.<sup>168</sup>

However, the supporters of the League largely dismissed the constitutional arguments against the Covenant, construing it to be aligned with the Constitution. As they pointed out, all the decisions of the League Council, in which the United States would have been a permanent member, required unanimous consent and the approval of Congress when its constitutional prerogatives in declaring war were concerned. The fact that other Allies such as Britain had raised no substantial constitutional objections was seen as further indication that the legal arguments of the critics were unsubstantiated.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, as Antero Holmila and Pasi Ihalainen have noted, the questions regarding the relationship between sovereignty and the League were not as prevalent in Britain since the British widely trusted that the League would serve both national and imperial interests. And, when questions of national sovereignty did arise, advocates such as Conservative Robert Cecil (a framer of the Covenant) assured that the League did not rely on armed force to uphold peace. Instead, it relied on public opinion as its main weapon.<sup>170</sup> Nonetheless, as Ross argues, the lack of specific wording and

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<sup>166</sup> Ross, *The American Journal of Legal History* Vol. 53, No.1 (2013), pp. 29-38

<sup>167</sup> The expansion of war-state was largely a universal phenomenon during the war and liberalism, as Jörn Leonhard has noted, was in an increasing degree in retreat in belligerent societies in the late 1910s as basic rights were suspended on the pretext of state of emergency (see Leonhard 2018, 677-685).

<sup>168</sup> Ross, *The American Journal of Legal History* Vol. 53, No.1 (2013), pp. 33-40, 88

<sup>169</sup> Ross, *The American Journal of Legal History* Vol. 53, No.1 (2013), pp. 21, 31-32

<sup>170</sup> Holmila & Ihalainen, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* Vol. 13, No.2 (2018), pp. 34-35

the League supporters' disregard for and even derision of the constitutional arguments against the League impeded Wilson's case in favor of League membership thereby promoting its failure.<sup>171</sup>

After the Senate rejected League membership in 1919 and after the Republicans swept into the White House in the 1920 elections, the assertiveness of Congress increased.<sup>172</sup> Among the Republicans, there was little desire for a strong Executive after Wilson's polarizing presidency and the executive encroachments undertaken during the world war. Lodge, in recorded private discussions, did indeed view the League fight as part of "a great Constitutional struggle" to "reestablish" the powers of the Legislature and set up the constitutional order between the branches of the government.<sup>173</sup> In its 1920 platform, the Republican party pledged "to end executive autocracy and restore to the people their constitutional government" and to adopt a foreign policy based on the "scrupulous observance of our international engagements when lawfully assumed".<sup>174</sup> The succeeding Harding administration was thus forced to take the negative influence of Congress and particularly the Senate into account when devising a new course for American foreign policy at the 1921 Washington Conference. This was reflected in the proceedings of the conference in which the administration, unlike Wilson, was careful to include the Senate as part of the negotiations: The President appointed the Senate leaders of both parties into the delegation, which regularly informed the Senate on the progress of the negotiations.<sup>175</sup>

Nevertheless, when the Harding administration introduced the treaties of the Washington Conference to the Senate in 1922, it faced criticism similar to that of the Wilson administration three years earlier for infringing on the constitutional powers of Congress. The opposition (led by the former so-called irreconcilable Republicans who had opposed League membership in any form) centered on the first two articles of the Four-Power Treaty. These, according to opponents, were similar to the articles contained in the League Covenant and they represented another assault upon national sovereignty and the Constitution. The Four-Power Treaty – consisting of Britain, France, Japan, and the United States – was meant to remove the possibility for war in the Pacific region and thus enable the naval armament limitations contained within the Five-Power Treaty. While Article I committed the signatories to respect each other's territorial integrity and to refrain from using military force if a crisis emerged in the region, Article II committed the four signatory countries to openly communicate with each other in order to devise a coordinated response to an external aggression.<sup>176</sup> For the opponents, the seeming

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<sup>171</sup> Ross, *The American Journal of Legal History* Vol. 53, No.1 (2013), pp. 86-87

<sup>172</sup> Herring 2008, 444; Gould 2009, 70-71

<sup>173</sup> Ross, *The American Journal of Legal History* Vol. 53, No.1 (2013), pp. 39

<sup>174</sup> Republican party Platform of June 8, 1920

<sup>175</sup> Miller 1999, 114-115, 126-127

<sup>176</sup> The Library of Congress, *Insular possession, and dominions in the Pacific (Four-Power Treaty)*

vagueness of the articles enabled wide-ranging interpretations, which could then lead to violations of national sovereignty and the prerogatives of Congress – just like the League Covenant.

Many critics feared that Article I of the Four-Power Treaty, like Article XV of the League Covenant, would interfere domestic matters. For the opponents of the League, Article XV, which stipulated that the members submit to the League Council any disputes not submitted to arbitration that could result in “a rupture,” was vague enough to grant the Council the powers to interfere with issues involving domestic matters such as immigration and tariffs. These, as the opponents reminded, had often caused frictions between the United States and other countries.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, the opponents of the Four-Power Treaty considered that Article I did not exclude domestic matters from the treaty. Instead, as the article provided a joint conference between the signatories in order to settle controversies arising “out of any Pacific question and involving their said rights”,<sup>178</sup> this provision was seen as being sufficiently vague and broad to also cover domestic issues. Because of the frictions between Japan and the United States that had been caused by the discriminatory laws – the restrictions to Japanese immigration and the laws prohibiting Japanese land ownership in the western states – Robert La Follette Sr. (R-WI) argued that Japan could plausibly use the treaty in order to interfere with American domestic policy (and, by implication, interfere with the constitutional principle of federalism that granted states regional autonomy):

... unless it be held that this conflict with respect to the rights of Japanese in the Hawaiian Islands is a domestic question, clearly it would come within the scope of the authority conferred upon the body created by this treaty to determine questions of controversy which arise between the high contracting parties.<sup>179</sup>

For the Republicans who represented the western states in which the question of the assimilation of Japanese immigrants was most critical, reflecting widespread racial prejudices against “unassimilable Japanese”, the construction of the article had significant electoral implications: If broadly construed, the article seemingly challenged the states’ rights to enforce their popular discriminatory laws against the Japanese immigrants. Hiram Johnson (R-CA), a former Governor of California who had signed a bill prohibiting Japanese land ownership and whose principal political objective was to have stricter federal immigration laws,<sup>180</sup> regarded the question of Japanese immigration and land ownership as “one of extraordinary importance to the territory from which I come.” He insisted that if there was a possibility that the terms of the treaty covered domestic matters, the Senate should immediately vote in favor of reservations that would explicitly exclude issues such as immigration from the treaty: “No

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<sup>177</sup> Ross, *The American Journal of Legal History* Vol. 53, No.1 (2013), pp. 22-24

<sup>178</sup> The Library of Congress, *Insular possession, and dominions in the Pacific (Four-Power Treaty)*

<sup>179</sup> La Follette, *U.S Congressional Record* Vol.62, 3.22.1922, pp 4230

<sup>180</sup> Greenbaum 2000, 99-105

self-respecting nation, of course, can submit its domestic problems to any other nations at all. It is an impossibility in the very nature of nationality that one country should submit its domestic questions to another for decision, or to any number of others for decision.”<sup>181</sup>

The proponents of the Four-Power Treaty, however, rejected the concern that the “rights” in Article I could subject domestic matters such as immigration to arbitration. The article, as Frank Kellogg (R-MN) stated, only provided a mechanism for communication in the case of a regional crisis, containing no binding arrangements outside of consultation: “There is absolutely no binding agreement for us to do anything else than to meet and discuss any differences in order to avoid the calamities of war. (...) There is no agreement for arbitration, there must be unanimity and no action can be taken except by the respective Governments through their constitutional authority.” The Supreme Court, as Kellogg noted, had already ruled in the 1868 case of *Gordon* against the United States that the treaty language concerning the adjustment of disputes was in and of itself insufficient to establish a mechanism for arbitration. That required a third party by whose decisions the signatories had agreed to be bound; the article only bound the parties to discussions.<sup>182</sup> This, some Republicans argued, distinguished Article I from Article XV that enabled the League to subject all matters to arbitration in violation of national sovereignty. Miles Poindexter (R-WA), an anti-League west coast Senator, saw the Council as having the power “to decide every controversy which may arise between the nations of the world”, while the treaty only bound states “to respect their reciprocal rights” without losing “sovereignty”.<sup>183</sup>

Nonetheless, these accusations were embarrassing for the Republicans who had to defend the Four-Power Treaty from similar assertions to those they had used against the League three years earlier. In the debate over the League membership, the Republican Senators had repeatedly criticized the League for infringing on domestic jurisdiction, and they even saw it as fundamentally incompatible with the American system of federalism that provided states to have differing legislation on a wide variety of matters.<sup>184</sup> That is, if the League had the power to arbitrate disputes that arose from domestic policies (as in other cases, a decision was not enforceable unless it was unanimous) under Article XV, it not only infringed on national but also state sovereignty and the principle of federalism – in favor of which the Republicans had campaigned in the presidential 1920 elections, pledging to respect the states’ rights and to return to the constitutional order after Wilson’s “executive autocracy”.<sup>185</sup> Article I thus invoked criticism of hypocrisy, as many Democrats pointed out that the Republicans had

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<sup>181</sup> Johnson, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.27.1922, pp 4612

<sup>182</sup> Kellogg, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.7.1922, pp 3477

<sup>183</sup> Poindexter, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.21.1922, pp 4173

<sup>184</sup> Ross, *The American Journal of Legal History* Vol. 53, No.1 (2013), pp. 24

<sup>185</sup> Republican party Platform of June 8. 1920

previously argued that without reservations the League Council had the authority to assert what issues belonged to its jurisdiction. Eventually, majority leader Lodge submitted a reservation that excluded issues related to “the domestic jurisdiction of the respective powers” from the article – in favor of which the Senate voted unanimously.<sup>186</sup>

Despite the controversies surrounding Article I, the opposition centered principally on Article II that committed the signatories to “communicate with one another fully and frankly in order to arrive at an understanding as to the most efficient measures to be taken” in the case of an external aggression.<sup>187</sup> According to opponents such as William Borah (R-ID), the article effectively created an urgency to respond with coordinated military action against an aggressor because, if an exigency were to arise in the regions of East Asia and the Pacific, there was “no other method provided for settlement except war”.<sup>188</sup> Thus, in effect, the treaty constituted an alliance. Although it did not contain an explicit legal commitment to mutual defense, as opponents such as Borah were willing to admit, it did contain an unconstitutional *moral obligation* to collective security. The treaty, that is, violated the prerogative of Congress to declare war by setting up an arrangement which, under the implied terms of the treaty, necessitated joint military action against an external aggressor. “While technically Congress retains its power over peace or war,” Borah asserted, “morally its power is forfeited.” If an exigency were to arise in the region, and the Secretary of State in communication with other parties of the treaty agreed on joint military action, Congress could not then refuse military aid without exposing itself to charges of defaulting on its obligation – thus, being morally bound to go along with an administration:

Then the Congress of the United States is in the position of repudiating the Secretary of State or else following out the judgment he has exercised. When I think of the moral pressure which has been brought upon the Senate to follow without the crossing of a “t” or the dotting of an “i” the judgment of the Secretary of State in regard to this treaty, I know what a tremendous influence would be brought to bear upon the Congress to follow the judgment of the Secretary of State when he reported that the Red Army, 1,000,000 strong, was marching against Japan.<sup>189</sup>

This, Borah further considered, would parallel the situation in Great Britain on the eve of the First World War in 1914. Delineating the events leading up to the war and Foreign Secretary Edward Grey’s diplomatic maneuvers on the eve of the conflict, Borah concluded that Britain was eventually “swept into the war” by its treaty obligations to France which, while giving the Parliament a technical right to decide on the course of action, were nonetheless morally binding. The Parliament, as Borah cited Grey’s justifications in favor of involvement, was “free, as a matter of contract, and as a matter

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<sup>186</sup> Lodge, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.27.1922, pp 3614

<sup>187</sup> The Library of Congress, Insular possession, and dominions in the Pacific (Four-Power Treaty)

<sup>188</sup> Borah, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 13.3.1922, pp, 3791

<sup>189</sup> Borah, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.23.1922, pp 4328

of treaty” to not involve in France’s favor (when facing German aggression), but still it was “in honor bound to go to war along with France” because of “the friendship which had been built up between the two powers” during the course of their alliance. Similar to the British Parliament under the terms of the Triple Entente alliance, Congress would retain the “technical power to refuse” to go to war under the terms of the Four-Power Treaty but its “moral right or the moral power to refuse would be gone”. Then, as the decision to enter into war would be justified in terms of an appeal “to sustain the honor of the country”, Borah argued that Congress would be under intense moral pressure to aid the other signatories. This, in turn, would be a violation of the autonomy of Congress.<sup>190</sup>

These concerns regarding hidden unconstitutional moral obligations originated from the debate over the League membership in which President Wilson had dissociated the legal and moral obligations from each other, maintaining that while the United States would not be under any legal obligation to uphold collective security, Article X of the League Covenant did nevertheless contain a moral obligation that bound in conscience not in law. For Wilson, confronted by Borah at a White House meeting, a moral obligation in Article X was “an absolutely compelling” and no less binding than a legal one.<sup>191</sup> Whereas the Republican Senators largely rejected Wilson’s dissociations, as there could hardly be a morally binding commitment without a legal one (they were nevertheless concerned about the possibility that unspecified obligations could open the door for attacks against Congress if it was perceived as having renounced its treaty obligations),<sup>192</sup> anti-internationalists such as Borah embraced Wilson’s conceptual definitions as a basis for the constitutional attacks against the League: The moral obligations in the League Covenant, Borah argued in 1919, would reduce the Congress’ constitutional prerogatives to mere “technicalities”, while under the obligations in Article X the representatives of the League Council were granted dictatorial powers to make decisions on war and peace.<sup>193</sup>

While opponents such as Borah charged that Article II of the Four-Power Treaty like Article X of the League Covenant contained a moral obligation to collective security in violation of the prerogatives of Congress and national sovereignty, the Republican mainstream – like in the debate over League membership – rejected the conceptual dissociation between legal and moral obligations: That is, if an international obligation was not explicitly expressed in the language of the treaty, it did not exist. The country, as Miles Poindexter argued, could not “be bound to go to war by an implication. There must

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<sup>190</sup> Borah, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.13.1922, pp 3790-3791

<sup>191</sup> Toth, *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No.2 (1961), pp. 565

<sup>192</sup> Ross, *The American Journal of Legal History* Vol. 53, No.1 (2013), pp. 33; Wertheim, *Diplomatic History* Vol. 35, No.5 (2011), pp. 831

<sup>193</sup> Toth, *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No.2 (1961), pp. 565-566

be an express agreement before such a radical obligation as war is imposed upon a nation.”<sup>194</sup> Kellogg, likewise, contended that a representative of the United States could not obligate “his country to any course of action” without “the clearest and most specific language”. And, because the article was merely an agreement on communication in the case of a regional crisis, there was no urgency created under the terms of the article to do more than “to communicate fully and frankly with each other in order that the threatened aggression may be warded off or adjusted”.<sup>195</sup> Neither national sovereignty nor the war-making prerogatives of Congress, then, were violated under the explicit terms of the article, which only bound the parties of the treaty to open discussions.

Due to the lack of legally binding obligations for mutual defense, the proponents saw Article II of the Four-Power Treaty as incomparable to Article X of the League. For critics such as Hiram Johnson, both Article II and Article X contained the same “moral obligation” to collective security leaving the “freedom of action of our country” in tatters.<sup>196</sup> However, as Republicans such as Kellogg rejected the concept of moral obligation, viewing international obligations solely in legal terms, he denied the similarities between them. Article X, Kellogg stated, contained a definite obligation to military action in contrast to the Four-Power Treaty: (...) “there was a positive agreement to preserve the territorial integrity and political independence of every member of the league, and when the council had advised upon the means of enforcing the obligation, there was a treaty obligation for this country to act. There is no such language here.”<sup>197</sup> The treaty was then in line with the Constitution: It did not violate the war-making prerogative of Congress nor did it contain the ambiguous language of Article X, which, as Samuel Shortridge (R-CA) asserted, would have left the country “in such a position that if Congress asserted its constitutional power we would be charged with violating a treaty entered into.”<sup>198</sup>

Nevertheless, as in the case of Article I, the Senate also voted in favor of a reservation regarding Article II. The opposition to the article garnered enough support that it appeared conceivable that the Four-Power Treaty would not get the required three quarters of the Senate at its side due to fears that it could have been interpreted as containing an obligation to military action which, then, could have undermined the integrity of Congress if it was regarded as omitting its treaty obligations by failing to provide military support. The so-called Brandegee reservation drafted by Frank Brandegee (R-CT), an arch conservative critic of the League and a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee,<sup>199</sup> stated that the United States understood that “under the terms of this treaty there is no commitment

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<sup>194</sup> Poindexter, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.7.1922, pp, 3477

<sup>195</sup> Kellogg, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.7.1922, pp, 3477

<sup>196</sup> Johnson, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.13.1922, pp, 3782

<sup>197</sup> Kellogg, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.7.1922, pp, 3477

<sup>198</sup> Shortridge, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.22.1922, pp, 4237

<sup>199</sup> Miller 1999, 44; Janick, *The Historian*, vol. 35, no. 3 (1973) pp. 434–435

to armed force, no alliance, no obligation to join in any defense.”<sup>200</sup> For proponents such as Shortridge, though he regarded it as unnecessary, the reservation nonetheless settled the issue of constitutionality: “How can we further argue (...) that we are committed to armed force, that we have joined an alliance, and that there is an obligation resting upon us to join in any defense?”<sup>201</sup> Congress, Shortridge argued, continued to have “the power, cooperating with the Executive, to shape the policy of this Nation in peace time and in war time.”<sup>202</sup> The United States, then, maintained its freedom of action and, by extension, its national sovereignty under the terms of the treaty.

The opponents, however, were not satisfied by the Brandegee reservation because it did not go far enough to reframe the contents of the article and definitively secure the war-making prerogatives of Congress. Many Senators thus introduced competing reservations that went further than Brandegee’s in safeguarding the role of Congress in foreign policy. The most radical of these, arguably, was Hiram Johnson’s which would have practically nullified the treaty: If accepted, under his reservation the United States understood that under the terms of the treaty it assumed “no obligation, either legal or moral” and that the consent of Congress was “necessary to any adjustment or understanding”, and that it was also not bound to give its consent to any decisions.<sup>203</sup> The Senate ultimately rejected the competing proposals and voted in favor of the Brandegee reservation. Despite the failures to amend the treaty, the fact that the Senate would not have voted in favor of the treaty without the reservation illustrated the strength of the opponents and the renewed assertiveness of Congress which, after many years of a strong Executive, was wary of losing its constitutional powers. Thus, while this desire to return to the traditional balance of power between the branches of government, as William Ross notes, motivated the Republican opposition against Wilson’s League,<sup>204</sup> it remained potent when the party had taken full control of the federal government after Wilson’s presidency in 1920.

### **3.2 No to “Entangling Alliances” – Universal International Obligations as an only Acceptable Form for Transnational Arrangements**

Unlike many Republican Senators who prioritized national sovereignty and the freedom of action in world affairs, underlining the constitutional limitations for transnational engagements, the Democrats were generally more open to collective security arrangements. Thus, the problems in the Four-Power

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<sup>200</sup> The Library of Congress, *Insular possession, and dominions in the Pacific (Four-Power Treaty)*

<sup>201</sup> Shortridge, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.22.1922, pp, 4241

<sup>202</sup> Shortridge, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.22.1922, pp, 4236

<sup>203</sup> Johnson, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.15.1922, pp, 3905-3096

<sup>204</sup> Ross, *The American Journal of Legal History* Vol. 53, No.1 (2013), pp. 88

Treaty were not so much related to its supposed infringements on the autonomy of Congress but that it did not go *far enough* to prevent future wars. Many Democrats and progressive Republicans, in fact, feared that the Four-Power Treaty would disrupt international order due to its exclusiveness and limitedness: The treaty, that is, left aggressive and imperialistic actions unconstrained thus invoking suspicions among nations outside of the treaty and then wars. The Democrats tried via an amendment to radically change the content of the treaty – to universalize its obligations and to broaden its scope to the Asiatic mainland – and hence turn it more into the vein of the League of Nations (regarding its Article XVII). Though unquestionably a partisan move to embarrass the Republicans, it still reflected the prevalent concerns in the Senate: The amendment, critics argued, would prevent the reemergence of the old system of alliances and balance of power that had led to the First World War in 1914.

As the war between two hostile alliances broke out in Europe in 1914, it was generally understood in the United States that the war merely repeated the familiar patterns in European great power politics of which Presidents George Washington and Thomas Jefferson had warned about. Both of these so-called Founding Fathers had urged the young nation at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to adopt a careful sense of its global role and to remain impartial in foreign affairs – as Jefferson advised, to trade and pursue friendly relations with all nations but steer clear from entangling alliances which had regularly caused conflicts in Europe.<sup>205</sup> President Wilson agreed with the popular sentiment and he held all belligerents equally culpable to the outbreak of conflict: The war, Wilson argued, had erupted largely because of the old system of alliances and the balance of power thinking (also, because of the lack of democratic accountability) that had engendered suspicions and animosities rendering flexible and effective diplomacy to solve differences impossible. Like many progressives, Wilson initially favored the popular policy of neutrality because getting involved in the European great power conflict and its system of alliances seemed merely counterintuitive for achieving peace.<sup>206</sup>

Although the notion that alliances had caused the conflict in 1914 gained popularity particularly after the war, the causes behind the war were nevertheless more intricate and, as Jörn Leonhard has argued, the system of alliances was not among the driving factors in causing the conflict. Neither the Triple Entente between France, Great Britain and Russia nor the Triple Alliance between Austria-Hungary, Italy and Germany constituted a cohesive or offensive alliance. These alliances, in fact, lacked plans for offensive warfare and there were significant amounts of conflicting interests and disagreements within them. Leonhard, indeed, argues that the fact that these blocks did not form cohesive alliances fueled the escalation in 1914 by introducing the aspects of uncertainty and unpredictability to world

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<sup>205</sup> Nichols 2011, 4-5

<sup>206</sup> Price 2007, 9-11; Milne 2015, 102-105; Cooper Jr. 1969, 18-20, 36-37

politics. This, among the unwillingness to compromise, the lack of trust in the international system, and the lack of both clearly defined war aims and preparations all contributed to the outbreak of war in 1914. Thus, the war was far from a result of the antagonisms and plans between two competing and organized groups.<sup>207</sup> However, this notion was both during and after the war popular in the United States, arguably, because it gave the policy of non-involvement a moral justification and it reaffirmed the wisdom of the Founding Fathers.

Yet after the sinking of the *Lusitania* and German approaches to Mexico, the United States joined the war in 1917 (however, not as a formal ally of Great Britain and France but as an associate power). In his famous Fourteen Points and subsequent speeches, President Wilson envisioned peace founded not on reprisals or territorial gains but on the establishment of a league of nations that would replace the discredited system of secret diplomacy, the balance of power, and alliances, thus creating permanent peace. These, as he had argued throughout the war, had caused the conflict in 1914 and were no longer credible models for organizing transnational relations. Instead, permanent peace and the prevention of another world war was to be based on the creation of a league which, by establishing a “community of power” that guaranteed collective security for all states either large or small, rendered traditional practices – entangling alliances, secret diplomacy, and imperialistic expansion typical of European great power politics – outdated. This ambitious vision necessitated a drastic change in the traditional American foreign policy thinking which, ever since the country’s founding, had been founded on the premises of strict neutrality and geographical isolation from European affairs.<sup>208</sup>

When Wilson spoke in favor of the League membership to the American public in 1918-1919, he re-conceptualized the old foreign policy axioms in service of his vision of a new peaceful world system the League at its heart. The League, as he conceptualized it, was not a retreat from the country’s diplomatic traditions but a culmination of them: Whereas only limited and special alliances could “entangle” a country and foment wars, as Wilson argued in 1918, the League would eliminate the system of alliances altogether by creating a general alliance for the protection of universal rights.<sup>209</sup> Invoking President Jefferson’s warning of entangling alliances, Wilson spoke in favor of the League as a global “disentangling alliance” – an alliance which “would disentangle the peoples of the world those combinations in which they seek their own separate and private interests and unite peoples of the world upon a basis of common right and justice.”<sup>210</sup> The key element in the League, as Wilson argued, was its Article X that guaranteed collective security to all countries either large or small. This

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<sup>207</sup> Leonhard 2018, 63-65, 103-109

<sup>208</sup> Price 2007, 9-11; Milne 2015, 109-124; Cooper Jr. 1969, 9-14

<sup>209</sup> Knock 2019, 195-196

<sup>210</sup> Cooper Jr. 2001, 17

rendered alliances and arrangements made for expansionist purposes irrelevant and established a new era of peace. To lead this effort, he further argued, had been the nation's destiny since its founding.<sup>211</sup>

The Democrats, even though traditionally averse to global entanglements before Wilson's presidency, wholeheartedly embraced Wilson's internationalism and his concepts for a new peaceful world order during his presidency.<sup>212</sup> Thus, the burning question for many Democratic Senators in the debate over the treaties of the Washington Conference in 1922 was whether the Four-Power Treaty between Britain, France, Japan, and the United States constituted an entangling alliance of which the Founding Fathers had warned about and which the League – as envisioned by Wilson – sought to permanently remove from world affairs in order to maintain postwar peace. On one hand, because Article II on the consultation in the case of an external aggression included only the four signatories, thus excluding other potentially relevant countries from the discussions, the critics feared that the treaty would evoke concerns among states outside of the treaty because these would see it as an alliance directed against them. On the other hand, the fact that the treaty lacked provisions that prohibited infringements on other countries' rights was viewed as further exacerbating the fears among states outside of the treaty because these often suffered from Japanese expansionism in East Asia. The critics thus feared that the treaty (even if it would not in practical terms constitute an alliance) would lead to a counter-grouping and a cycle of antagonisms between the regional blocks and possibly to war like in 1914.

Yet, unlike the anti-League progressives within the Republican party who were also concerned of the implications of the Four-Power Treaty to global stability and peace, the Democrats largely approved alliances that would constrain the country's freedom of action and its sovereign rights if these were such that they did not give rise to suspicions or countermeasures among countries outside of a treaty. The Democratic Senators hence made a conceptual dissociation between an alliance of war and peace – between an entangling alliance of which the founders had warned about and which had disrupted peace in Europe in the past and an alliance such as the League that was only meant to maintain mutual rights and to uphold peace and not to infringe on rights of others. Atlee Pomerene (D-OH), as he cited President Washington's 1796 Farewell Address, pointed out that his warnings against "permanent alliances" were "based upon the situation in Europe as he then saw it" and he therefore could not have referred to treaties that only obligated signatories "to respect one another's rights or agreements to sit down at the council table to talk the subject over in the event that these rights were infringed."<sup>213</sup> An

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<sup>211</sup> Milne 2015, 110-117; Knock 2019, 144-146, 196

<sup>212</sup> Jenner 2011, 2-6; Widenor 1980, 125-126

<sup>213</sup> Pomerene, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.22.1922, pp. 4247

alliance, as Duncan Fletcher (D-FL) also insisted, should be evaluated on the basis of its purposes – that is, whether it was meant for offense or for the prevention of conflicts:<sup>214</sup>

The word “alliance” has been misused. Every agreement among nations is not an “alliance.” Even if it were, the alliance may be such as to promote peace rather than an alliance of a military character in contemplation of war. There can surely be no objection to such an alliance which would eliminate the probability of dispute and war.<sup>215</sup>

The Four-Power Treaty, as its Democratic supporters conceptualized it, was a peaceful alliance like the League that was not created for expansionist purposes. Instead, it was meant to maintain peace in the Pacific region. Invoking the authority of President Washington’s Address, Pomerene pointed out that rather than condemning alliances altogether as some critics asserted, Washington had approved “temporary alliances” under “extraordinary emergencies.” Because of the global instability and the economic strains that arose from the armament competition, Pomerene considered that the prevailing conditions were such that they justified joining a “temporary alliance” as Washington had advised. Article III, as he noted, provided that the treaty lasted ten years and hence, as it merely obligated the contracting parties “to respect one another’s rights on our insular possessions and dominions”, it was unimaginable that a sufficient danger would arise from the treaty that justified not ratifying it.<sup>216</sup> John Sharp Williams (D-MS) who, in the debate over the League membership, had railed against the Republicans for wanting “unlimited American sovereignty and unlimited preparation for universal war”,<sup>217</sup> went even further as he asserted that the treaty – like the League – constituted “an alliance to keep the peace” by having behind it “latent force” to maintain the stability in the Pacific region.<sup>218</sup> The treaty thus constituted both a defensive and peaceful military alliance to secure the mutual rights of the contracting parties.

For many Democrats, however, the Four-Power Treaty was far from identical with the League which secured the rights of all nations. Instead, it represented an alliance typical for the prewar era politics that had led to the war in 1914 and against which the founders had warned. The key problem in the treaty, as Carter Glass (D-VA) asserted, was that it consisted of “too few member nations.” This, and its broad and ambiguous obligation to maintain “the ‘rights’ of the contracting parties” in the Pacific, was an incentive for regional distrust and imperialistic expansion. Unlike the League that constituted “a world alliance” for the maintenance of “universal peace”, Glass regarded the Four-Power Treaty as “a group intrigue, such as has disturbed the peace of Europe for 200 years; a group alliance such

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<sup>214</sup> Fletcher, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.8.1922, pp. 3559-3560

<sup>215</sup> Fletcher, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.8.1922, pp. 3559-3560

<sup>216</sup> Pomerene, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.22.1922, pp. 4248

<sup>217</sup> Cooper Jr. 2001, 101

<sup>218</sup> Williams, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.28.1922, pp. 4698

as our forefathers denounced and against which this Nation has set its face since its existence; a group alliance pregnant with war itself.”<sup>219</sup> As the treaty seemingly revived the old war-inducing system of alliances, establishing regional hegemony between the four signatory states, Democratic critics such as William King (D-UT) saw it as conflicting with the purpose of the League that was to end “the old system of checks and balances and alliances.” Thus, the treaty would be regarded “as reactionary and as a backward step and as opposed to the great spiritual and moral tide” prevailing in the world as a result of the League.<sup>220</sup>

The anti-League progressives went even further in their criticism of treaty than the majority of the Democratic Senators who, though concerned of the implication of the treaty to peace, were not principally opposed to it as an alliance: The burning question was whether it caused wars or prevented them. However, anti-League progressives such as William Borah (R-ID) who led the opposition in the Senate went even so far as to contend that it made little difference what the objectives of the treaty were or whether it in practical terms constituted an alliance or not because, as it created a “community of interests” among the contracting parties, it led to same results as that of all alliances in the past. The “political groupings” of all types, he argued, had throughout history led to distrust, antagonisms, counter-groups, and ultimately to wars.<sup>221</sup> Borah, in effect, denounced all international associations as an incentive for wars making no dissociations between them. As a fierce nationalist, his rejection of international rapprochements stemmed from his contemptuous views of Europe that posed a historical challenge to the American ideals: In order to develop its ideals, as he had argued in 1919, the United States had to separate itself from the influence of Europe in its entirety.<sup>222</sup> Borah believed that the conference, as it brought to America the dangerous European alliance system, would lead to war as in 1914 when antagonisms between two competing groups had ultimately ignited the conflict:

For 20 years the political atmosphere of Europe had been poisoned with the distrust and enmity fostered and nursed by these two groups; for 20 years the chancelleries of Europe had been embittered and estranged by these groups; and the infernal system was as certainly the cause of the World War as the going down of the sun is the cause of the darkness of the night. (...) What the delegates from Europe brought over and gave us in the name of peace is this old hellish system whose frightful story is told upon a thousand battle fields of the Old World.<sup>223</sup>

The Democratic opposition to the treaty centered on an amendment put forward by Joseph Robinson (D-AR) who, in the debate over the League membership, had arisen to prominence within the party

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<sup>219</sup> Glass, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.23.1922, pp. 4326

<sup>220</sup> King, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 30.3.1922, pp 4773

<sup>221</sup> Borah, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.13.1922, pp. 3787

<sup>222</sup> Toth, *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No.2 (1961), pp. 560-561

<sup>223</sup> Borah, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.13.1922, pp. 3789

by aggressively attacking the Republican Senators for their efforts to amend the League Covenant.<sup>224</sup> The amendment contained two provisions: On one hand, it committed the parties of the treaty to “respect the rights and possessions of all other nations and refrain from all acts of aggression against any other power or powers” and on the other, in the case of a regional crisis, it committed the signatory countries to “invite all powers claiming an interest in the controversy to a joint conference” for the purpose of adjustment.<sup>225</sup> In contrast to the Brandegee reservation that stipulated that the United States under the terms of the treaty assumed no obligations to mutual defense, Robinson considered that the treaty required more fundamental modifications because, while a reservation “expresses the interpretation of the Government”, an amendment changes “the meaning of a treaty.”<sup>226</sup> While Republican opponents such as Borah did not pledge to vote in favor of the treaty with the amendment attached, many Democratic opponents saw it as a decisive issue in terms of their support for the treaty.

According to the Wilsonian Democrats, Robinson’s amendment would have removed the question of whether the treaty constituted a European-styled alliance or not by expanding the commitments in the treaty and making them universal. As Robinson argued, it would have expelled fears among other countries that feared that the contracting parties were “asserting and claiming the right to immunity from aggression by others, while denying to others protection against their aggression.” In addition, as the amendment would have effectively turned the treaty into a general agreement that committed the four contracting parties to just and legal conduct in international relations more extensively, the opponents considered that this would have restrained the Japanese intervention into the territories of Russia and China. Because Japanese expansionism constituted the main source of contention in the region, the amendment would have then removed the causes of wars in Asia. According to Robinson, “it would have been long advance toward securing peace in the Orient.”<sup>227</sup> However, if the Senate rejected it, Thomas Walsh (D-MT) who, in 1919, was among the leading League advocates in the Senate,<sup>228</sup> argued that this would “arouse the suspicions of the countries outside” and “precipitate the organization of a counter group of some kind or other.”<sup>229</sup>

Moreover, as the amendment provided wider participation in a conference to adjust a regional crisis, the Democratic critics of the treaty considered that this would remove the most apparent shortcoming in the treaty: To settle a crisis, all interested parties had to be represented in the process of adjustment

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<sup>224</sup> Weller Jr. 1998, 82-84

<sup>225</sup> Robinson, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.9.1922, pp 3606

<sup>226</sup> Robinson, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.13.1922, pp 3785

<sup>227</sup> Robinson, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.13.1922, pp 3785

<sup>228</sup> Bates 1999, 170-173

<sup>229</sup> Walsh, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.14.1922, pp 3850

and not only the four signatories whose aggressive actions might have caused the situation. This was modeled on Article XVII of the League Covenant which, according to Robinson, provided a “much fairer” process. In the case of a dispute between a member of the League and a non-member, Article XVII granted that the country not a member of the League would be invited to become a member for the purposes of hearing and solving the dispute (the Council, however, had the ultimate authority to determine the conditions for this).<sup>230</sup> Although Republican critics of the treaty such as Hiram Johnson (R-CA) considered that the amendment did not “cure” the true problem in the treaty that was in its effects on national sovereignty and the Constitution, they did sympathize it as a clear improvement. Without the inclusion of other countries, Johnson regarded any negotiations as ineffective: (...) “for if this be a mere pact for conference, it is perfectly futile to confer only among four powers interested in the Pacific, rather than among all powers interested in the Pacific.”<sup>231</sup>

Robinson’s amendment, which was mainly designed to garner support for the opposition from other Democratic Senators and to challenge the treaty without repudiating it, was strongly rejected by the Republican supporters of the treaty. The amendment would have effectively forced the administration to renegotiations with other contracting parties and, as a result, there was little desire outside of the critics to vote in favor of the amendment. The issue was also an ideological one. While the opponents saw the exclusiveness of the treaty as its main defect because it supposedly invoked distrust among states outside of the treaty, the Republicans regarded the limitedness as the treaty’s foremost strength. The regional scope of the treaty separated it from the League that supposedly committed the United States to maintain collective security worldwide. According to Miles Poindexter (R-WA), the amendment would have turned “this simple, limited, and practical agreement between the powers of the Pacific Ocean to respect each other’s rights,” into “another League of Nations” that would involve the United States to “the controversies of the rest of the world”.<sup>232</sup> The fact that the treaty was limited made it different from the League, and it thus represented an ideal regional agreement.

As the Republicans prioritized the protection of freedom of action and national sovereignty, they were more willing to weaken the obligations in the treaty rather than to strengthen or expand them. Instead of Robinson’s amendment, the Senate was more willing to vote in favor of the Brandegee reservation that stipulated that the United States assumed no obligations to mutual defense under the terms of the treaty. Despite the resistance coming from the White House,<sup>233</sup> the Senate would not have voted in favor of the agreement without the reservation, which demonstrated the weakness of the Wilsonian

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<sup>230</sup> Robinson, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.13.1922, pp 3785

<sup>231</sup> Johnson, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.18.1922, pp 4073

<sup>232</sup> Poindexter, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.21.1922, pp 4180

<sup>233</sup> NYT, “Harding balks on reservation” 21. March 1922

Democrats who failed to garner support for more drastic modifications. Even a pro-League newspaper such as the New York Times disparaged the opposition by ridiculing “amateur diplomats” who “expound latent meanings in the treaties and point out conclusions which escaped the very men who drafted them”.<sup>234</sup> Moreover, after the debate over the treaty had ended, the Senate voted unanimously in favor of the supplementary treaty to the Four-Power Treaty that excluded the Japanese home islands from the range of the main treaty. This rebutted the arguments of the critics, who feared that if Japan would face a threat to its home islands from either Russia or China, the United States would be obligated to confer or even assist Japan. Thus, the supplement effectively reaffirmed the regional and limited emphasis in the treaty.

After President Wilson had tried to redefine the new course to not only American foreign policy but also to world politics by envisioning a new peaceful world order that was based on the commitments to collective security under the auspices of the League, the Republicans successfully repudiated his vision by establishing parameters for acceptable international commitments. Instead of wide-ranging and offensive international obligations that contradicted the Constitution, the Republicans proposed an alternative based on limited and regional rather than universal obligations, which secured national sovereignty and the nation’s freedom of action. However, a seeming paradox emerged as the Republicans (aware of the upcoming Congressional elections at the end of the year) emphasized the significance of the treaties of the conference to peace: If the treaties contained no forcible obligations and since the naval armament limitations led to no substantial disarmament, how could the conference have any significance comparable to that of the League? Adhering to Wilson’s vision of the so-called New Diplomacy, as is discussed in the following chapter, the Republicans claimed that the conference had succeeded where the League had failed by laying the foundation for new more democratically accountable and peaceful postwar diplomacy, thus replacing old destructive diplomatic practices.

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<sup>234</sup> NYT, “Amateur Diplomats” 22. March 1922

## 4. Public Opinion Guarantees World Peace

At the beginning of the 1920s, even among the most nationalist circles of the Senate, wide bipartisan support existed for what George Kennan – a preeminent cold war strategist – subsequently described as the “legalistic-moralistic approach to international problems.”<sup>235</sup> That is, based on the belief in the infallibility of public opinion, there was a wide understanding that by democratizing the handling of diplomacy universally and by opening it up to public scrutiny, the overwhelming power of public opinion in democratic states would sanction the representatives to pursue peace. Although this belief was identified with President Woodrow Wilson during the First World War as a result of his advocacy of the so-called New Diplomacy, Republicans viewed the Washington Conference as putting the new diplomatic ideals into effect thereby creating a significant precedent. The political left, however, was skeptical. Reflecting the wide inter-and intraparty discontent regarding the resurgence of conservative politics after the war at the turn of the 1920s, some progressives denounced the conference as an extension of the prewar era politics that manifested the corruption of the current political elites. Yet even the most poignant criticism did not challenge the prevalent belief in the democratized diplomacy.

### 4.1 The Washington Conference as the Epitome of the Democratically Accountable “New Diplomacy”

For its proponents, including Senators from both parties, the 1921-1922 Washington Conference represented a crucial advance towards peace because it laid the basis for new peaceful diplomatic practices. On one hand, due to the transparency of the conference, the proponents considered that the conference had enabled the publics worldwide to pressure the delegates to reconcile their differences and negotiate the treaties in Washington. This, in turn, set a precedent for future developments toward increasing the democratic control of diplomacy and elevating the importance of public opinion in world politics. On the other hand, the treaties of the conference were widely regarded as strengthening international norms by relying on the moral power of international public opinion rather than on any forcible obligation to supply military force. The treaties were viewed as fostering international public support for the principles expressed in the treaties, thus compelling states to a more peaceable and moral international conduct in the future. This, along with increasingly democratized diplomacy, was

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<sup>235</sup> Clinton 2017, 46

seen as entailing a fundamental change in world politics as a result of which world public opinion was to be the guiding force in world politics in the future, enabling further advances towards peace.

The Anglophone visions for a new democratized world order, in which the enlightened public opinion would control policies, were inspired by the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Although these visions had their roots in the prewar era, their prevalence in the public discourse increased due to the widespread notion that the “old diplomacy” – characterized by imperialism and secret treaties – had not only failed but had also contributed to the outbreak of the war. Hence, in the subsequent debates among socialists and progressives (or, in the British context, liberals), the political left both in Britain and the United States prioritized the replacement of undemocratic prewar practices with the “new diplomacy” of transparent negotiations and foreign policy placed under democratic control. The peoples through their elected representatives, rather than unaccountable officials, would be trusted to solve the global crises of the future.<sup>236</sup> In the American discourse, these views were expressed most vociferously through progressive organizations – the most prominent of which was the Woman’s Peace Party headed by renowned peace activist Jane Addams. Their peace plans, as Thomas Knock notes, had an instrumental influence on President Wilson whose views on postwar world order were undeveloped at the start of the war. He, in fact, was frequently in contacts with Addams during the war, and these debates within the political left provided the foundation for his subsequent vision.<sup>237</sup>

As the United States joined the war in 1917, a few months after Wilson had secured his second term in office, the Democratic administration began to actively promote the so-called New Diplomacy, which crystallized the progressive vision of the administration for international relations. The war, as Wilson framed it, was the “people’s war” fought in order to advance democratic ideals and to replace the discredited European great power politics with new international instruments. At the core of his vision was the creation of a league, which consequently became a crucial Allied war aim along with the destruction of German militarism in the name of democracy. A league, as Wilson envisioned it, would advance democracy and work as an intergovernmental body comprised of democratic states through which disputes would be resolved in open negotiations. Moreover, based on the assumptions that the war would lead to the expansion of democracy both at societal and global levels, progressives such as Wilson – along with many British Liberals and even Conservatives – believed that this would result in world public opinion which, via the openness of the League, would exercise its influence on world politics in the future. Because the citizenries would hold the elected representatives accountable

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<sup>236</sup> Knock 2019, 83-89; Holmila & Ihalainen, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* Vol. 13, No.2 (2018), pp. 25-28

<sup>237</sup> Knock 2019, 83-86

for their decisions in the elections and world opinion would sanction the governments to proffer peace during open negotiations, this was believed to lay the basis for lasting peace in the future.<sup>238</sup>

Indeed, as the war ended in a brief moment of the widespread democratization of European societies, including Germany, the moment for restructuring international relations on a democratic basis seemed to have emerged.<sup>239</sup> The framers of the League Covenant in the 1918 Paris Peace Conference sought to create a league as a basis for a new era in international relations, in which world public opinion – rather than unelected elites – would control the course of world politics in the future: Instead of secret prewar diplomacy, which was often accused of causing the war, the framers such as Wilson contended that the League should provide an open mechanism through which international public opinion could control world politics. Accordingly, as the governments would listen to their citizens, providing them with political education, it was believed that the result would be an increase in the quality of public debates and the consequent creation of an enlightened world public opinion that would disincentivize war.<sup>240</sup> The physical force implied in Article X of the Covenant, therefore, was only maintained in the background as a last resort, according to the framers. This reliance on what Wilson called “the moral force of the public opinion of the world, the cleansing and clarifying and compelling influences of publicity” was also a response to France’s more far-reaching plans for a military league, which evoked distrust among British and American diplomats.<sup>241</sup> It would have arguably also been entirely unacceptable to the American public.

However, as Wilson was compelled to make compromises regarding the Versailles Treaty in order to realize his vision of a league, which was his overriding priority in Paris, the results of the conference were ultimately denounced not only by the conservative right but also by the progressive left.<sup>242</sup> While the Republicans regarded Article X as a definitive obligation to provide collective security thereby infringing on national sovereignty, the progressives were disillusioned by the terms of the Versailles Treaty and the ostensible secret negotiations in Paris. For many progressives, whose support Wilson needed to wage a successful public campaign against the Republicans, the conference appeared as continuing the secretive and imperialist prewar era diplomacy – the diplomacy against which the war was fought. When the Versailles Treaty imposed a punitive peace on Germany, compelling it to pay severe reparations and to surrender all of its colonies to other empires through the League’s mandate

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<sup>238</sup> Cochran & Navari 2017, 1-2, 8-10; McCarthy 2011, 15-20; Holmila & Ihalainen, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* Vol. 13, No.2 (2018), pp. 28, 36-38; Ihalainen & Leonhard 2021, 145-148

<sup>239</sup> Ihalainen 2017, 13, 17-18

<sup>240</sup> Ihalainen, *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, Vol. 39 No.1 (2019) pp. 15-16; Holmila & Ihalainen, *Contributions to the History of Concepts* Vol. 13, No.2 (2018), pp. 25-28, 36-38

<sup>241</sup> Yearwood 2009, 115-116

<sup>242</sup> Thompson, *International Affairs* Vol. 86, No. 1 (2010) pp. 37-38

system, the progressives were widely demoralized. Even for Wilson's staunchest supporters such as Herbert Croly, who was the leading progressive intellectual at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the League could not save the treaty that he saw as a test for "liberalism" itself, which laid the foundation for future wars.<sup>243</sup> Wilson thus lacked the political support required to force the Republicans to vote for the League membership without alterations, which led to the failure of its ratification in 1919.<sup>244</sup>

In 1921, a year after the Senate had for the last time voted against the League membership, the Harding administration organized the International Disarmament Conference in Washington. Yet the initiative did not originate from the White House, but from Senator William Borah (R-ID) who, soon after President Warren Harding had taken office, submitted a resolution that urged the Republican administration to organize the conference. Though among the most vocal critics of the League, Borah succeeded in gathering substantial public support and international sympathy for his resolution. Thus, although initially reluctant to surrender its initiative in foreign policy, the Republican administration ultimately agreed, and, after the resolution was passed in Congress, it organized the conference with sizeable public support. The conference resulted in three important international treaties that furthered the postwar recovery: While both the Four- and the Nine-Power Treaty successfully stabilized the great power competition in East Asia and the Pacific regions, the Five-Power Treaty eased the global naval arms competition by limiting naval armaments between the greatest naval powers in the world – the United States, Great Britain, Japan, Italy, and France.<sup>245</sup> Since it was widely considered that the arms race was among the key factors in triggering the war in 1914, the treaties received extensive international support and were widely commended in the American press.<sup>246</sup>

The Harding administration, as it tried to utilize the extensive public support for disarmament and to prevent the accusations of secrecy often associated with the approach of its predecessor in the Paris Peace Conference, ensured the proceedings in Washington were more open by having stenographers present and providing constant updates of the negotiations to both the newspapers and the Senate.<sup>247</sup> The Senate majority leader, Henry Cabot Lodge (R-MA), in fact, contended that no other negotiations in history had "ever conducted with so little secrecy as were those held by the conference which has recently adjourned."<sup>248</sup> Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, head of the American delegation (in which Lodge had also participated as a member),<sup>249</sup> argued that the public engagement and

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<sup>243</sup> Cochran & Navari 2017, 10-12; Knock 2019, 312-314

<sup>244</sup> Knock 2019, 309-310, 320-321

<sup>245</sup> Herring 2008, 452, 454-455; Miller 1999, 102-115

<sup>246</sup> Krepon & Caldwell & Buckley 2016, 65-66

<sup>247</sup> Miller 1999, 126-127

<sup>248</sup> Lodge, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.8.1922, pp 3547

<sup>249</sup> Miller 1999, 114-115

education had been at the heart of the work of the conference when he spoke at the Washington Correspondents dinner in 1922 – while the agreements were pending in the Senate: “I was trying to deal with this work in a manner compatible with our theories of democratic institutions and to make our work as intelligible to the public as thoroughly understood by the people, as the circumstances of the case would permit.”<sup>250</sup> The Harding administration’s aim, in other words, was to empower the peoples and to lend the administration’s policy democratic legitimacy.

The Republicans thus considered that the Washington Conference had succeeded where the League and the Paris Peace Conference had failed by laying the foundation for a new democratic era in the administration of international affairs. The San Francisco Chronicle, in an article added to the Records by Samuel Shortridge (R-CA), asserted that the “Versailles conference was probably the last great congress of the nations to be dominated by the old diplomatic methods” as the President had through the Washington Conference put an end to “the centuries-old system of secret diplomacy born of the imperialistic principle and the balance-of-power idea.”<sup>251</sup> Following this, although the notion of New Diplomacy had originated from the debates within the Anglophone left during the war, it was widely adopted by the Republicans for whom the conference had innovatively empowered the peoples of the world, who had consequently pressured the delegates to reconcile their differences and negotiate the treaties in Washington. Instead of divvying up the world as had occurred in Paris, as a result of which Western empires had taken control of Ottoman and German colonies, Irving Lenroot (R-WI) argued that “world opinion” – which had arisen from “the tremendous losses in the war” – had forced the great powers “to take a different view” in Washington. This, he considered, was illustrated by the benevolent treatment of China through the Nine-Power Treaty:<sup>252</sup>

If there had been no change in the world thought, instead of a part of China being restored to her, a conference of these four powers would have carved up China among them, the sovereignty of China would have gone, and China would have gone down into history as a nation that was but is no more.<sup>253</sup>

This change in world politics, according to supporters, manifested especially in the limitation of naval armament treaty – the purpose for which the conference was organized. After the war, disarmament was a pressing concern for many Anglophone intellectuals and political leaders, who believed that the League would further this cause by utilizing the power of public opinion and compel France to disarm after the German military was disarmed via the Versailles Treaty.<sup>254</sup> However, it was only at

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<sup>250</sup> The New York Times, “Shears for Hughes for ‘Gordian knots’” 12. March 1922

<sup>251</sup> Shortridge, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.23.1922, pp 4331

<sup>252</sup> Lenroot, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.18.1922, pp 4080

<sup>253</sup> Lenroot, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.18.1922, pp 4080-4081

<sup>254</sup> Carr & Cox 2016, 34

the Washington Conference when this “next step” in the cause of disarmament was taken, and for many Republicans, this implied great progress in moving away from old militaristic practices. Porter McCumber (R-ND), who had reacted positively to Wilson’s internationalism during the war and who, in the debate on the League membership, was consequently ostracized by the Republican leadership,<sup>255</sup> considered the “world conscience” had “found its birth and expression in the coming together of these nations,” which had subsequently agreed to the armament limitations in order to “avert another such world calamity.” This “expression”, even more than the actual results of the conference themselves, laid the groundwork for peace and moving “toward world sanity.”<sup>256</sup>

The Washington Conference was then regarded as setting a precedent for increasing the democratic control of foreign policy in the future, by encouraging peoples worldwide to take active measures in guiding the world in a more peaceful direction. Thus, while Democratic opponents such as William King (D-UT) regarded the results of the conference as uninspiring by bringing about merely partial armament limitations, proponents such as Senate minority leader Oscar Underwood (D-AL) saw the conference as indicative of a larger movement toward world peace. In Underwood’s (who had also taken part in the conference as part of the American delegation) response to King,<sup>257</sup> he underscored the transitional role of the conference as inspiring “the great democratic peoples of the world” to take more active measures in the future and thus compel nations worldwide to “disarm for the universal peace of the world.”<sup>258</sup> Arthur Capper (R-KS), as he cited President Harding’s farewell address to the conference, agreed that world public opinion had advanced to a point where it, rather than armed preparedness in favor of which Harding along with other Republican Senators had argued during the war (therefore criticizing Wilson for naivety and irresponsibility),<sup>259</sup> would ensure peace in the future:

“I once believed,” he said, “in armed preparedness. I advocated it. But I have come now to believe there is better preparedness in a public mind and a world opinion made ready to grant justice precisely as it exacts it. And justice is better served in a conference of peace than in a conflict at arms.”<sup>260</sup>

Yet in contrast to Wilson, most Republicans were legalists for whom the advancement of democracy went hand in hand with the strengthening of international law. Wilson, as Stephen Wertheim notes, perceived legal mechanisms as impeding the function of the League to superintend the development of international public opinion. Reflecting his long-held concerns regarding the American system of government with its formal Constitution, which in his view stood in the way of organic national

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<sup>255</sup> Miller 1999, 52, 99

<sup>256</sup> McCumber, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.14.1922, pp 3837

<sup>257</sup> Miller 1999, 115

<sup>258</sup> Underwood, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.28.1922, pp 4689

<sup>259</sup> Knock 2019, 92-95

<sup>260</sup> Capper, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.18.1922, pp 4087

development, Wilson disregarded the development of international law through the League. Hence, the provision for the creation of an international court was adopted into the League Covenant only as a result of British and French insistence. For the Republicans, the lack of legalistic institutions was one of the League's greatest shortcomings, which was only overshadowed by Article X on collective security.<sup>261</sup> Leading Republicans such as Elihu Root, whom Harding had appointed to the American delegation in 1921, viewed the process of democratization as interdependent with the proliferation of a law-based world system. In other words, the increasing public control of national politics worldwide presupposed the creation of a law-governed international order in which "world-wide public opinion" would hold states accountable by denouncing the breaches of international law that was developed through traditions and precedents.<sup>262</sup>

The Washington Conference was indeed a landmark moment for its proponents which, through its treaties, had symbiotically advanced both the international democratic control of diplomacy and the development of international law and norms – especially through both the Four- and the Nine-Power Treaty. While the Four-Power Treaty – consisting of Britain, the United States, France, and Japan – was intended to eliminate the potential for war in the Pacific by committing the contracting parties to respect each other's territorial integrity and refrain from using armed force if a crisis arose in the region, the Nine-Power Treaty was intended to stabilize the great power competition in China by obligating the signatories (also including Italy, Belgium, Portugal, and the Netherlands) to respect China's territorial integrity and national sovereignty.<sup>263</sup> Although these did not contain any forcible obligations, which in turn made them susceptible to the criticism of inconsequentiality, the proponents considered that the treaties had powerful *moral force* behind them imposed by international public opinion. In other words, by obligating the signatory countries to respect the generally acknowledged international rules of conduct, the treaties strengthened the presence of these principles as part of international law and norms. As a result, international public opinion would sanction the peaceable and ethical behavior thereby preventing aggressions that might violate these norms in the future.

The Nine-Power Treaty, though reducible to "a friendly declaration" as William King pointed out,<sup>264</sup> was nonetheless conceptualized as a significant advance in the strengthening of the international rules of conduct. According to Democratic leader Underwood, who led the campaign for the ratification of the treaty in the Senate, the treaty – through which the signatory states agreed to respect the principles of national sovereignty and territorial integrity regarding China – would ultimately reinforce the status

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<sup>261</sup> Wertheim, *Diplomatic History* Vol. 35, No.5 (2011), pp. 822-831

<sup>262</sup> Russell 2017, 40-42

<sup>263</sup> Herring 2008, 454-455

<sup>264</sup> King, *U.S Congressional Record* Vol.62, 3.30.1922, pp 4769

of these principles as part of actual international law as opposed to theoretical principles that had no practical effects in world affairs: (...) “when a number of great nations meet together and enter into a treaty mutually binding themselves to respect each other’s rights, each other’s territorial integrity, each other’s sovereignty, then we come very much nearer to making what we all deem should be international law in fact and not merely in theory.”<sup>265</sup> Thus, as the treaty had consolidated the status of these principles as guiding rules in international conduct, forcible obligations for the defense of China’s rights were not imperative: The binding effect of the treaty, as Underwood argued, resulted not from an obligation to militarily defend China’s sovereign rights but from a more effective “moral obligation” which would turn an aggressor into an outcast in international relations:<sup>266</sup>

There is no obligation that one of the nine nations which signed the treaty can call on another nation to use force. But there is a moral obligation that will make the nation which violates it an outlaw in the face of the world.<sup>267</sup>

The aim, in other words, was to cultivate the moral power of international public opinion around the generally recognized principles of international conduct and hence prevent any further infringements of China’s rights. If these, Underwood argued, had been part of “actual international law” in the past, the treaty would be trivial because “the moral force of the powers of the world” would have deterred the previous aggressions against China, preventing its violent colonialization.<sup>268</sup> Similarly, regarding the treaty on the use of submarines and noxious gases in warfare (a declaratory agreement intended to end the use of submarines against civilians and neutrals and the use of toxic gases in warfare), the supporters anticipated that the treaty would further develop international norms in opposition to the new methods of warfare – particularly against the use of poisonous gases that were largely viewed as inhumane and the use of which had caused an outcry during the war (however, these weapons were largely ineffective in combat).<sup>269</sup> Hence, whereas critics such as James Wadsworth (R-NY) regarded the treaty as impractical and “not be worth the paper it is written on,”<sup>270</sup> majority leader Lodge noted that the true purpose of the treaty was not to ban these weapons but to organize “the public opinion of the world against” gases and thus “make that public opinion more effective.” The power of public opinion, according to Lodge, would preemptively stop the usage of poison gases in future wars.<sup>271</sup>

The Four-Power Treaty, even more so than the other treaties of the Washington Conference, was regarded as a potent force for peace because, by laying the basis for future conferences, it enabled the

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<sup>265</sup> Underwood, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.30.1922, pp 4762

<sup>266</sup> Underwood, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.30.1922, pp 4763

<sup>267</sup> Underwood, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.30.1922, pp 4763

<sup>268</sup> Underwood, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.30.1922, pp 4763

<sup>269</sup> Leonhard 2018, 263-268

<sup>270</sup> Wadsworth, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.28.1922, pp 4728

<sup>271</sup> Lodge, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.28.1922, pp 4730

moral influence of world public opinion to be applied in pressuring the parties into peace in the future. That is, in the case of a regional exigency, Article I of the treaty provided that the four contracting parties would settle a dispute by a joint conference if traditional diplomatic mechanisms had failed. This, Duncan Fletcher (D-FL) argued, laid the basis for future conferences in which international public opinion could exercise its moral pressure to generate a peaceful and reasoned settlement: “The agreement is to hold council, to determine who is in the wrong, to let the world know the conclusions reached, the idea no doubt being that the public opinion of mankind would very likely exercise powerful weight to prevent war.”<sup>272</sup> McCumber, similarly, believed that if “clouds of distrust ever appear,” the article would provide continuing peace in the Pacific by assuring that “the potential power of human conscience, the sense of justice and right” were given “their full and free expression” in solving global disputes. No country, then, would risk standing “dishonored before all nations” and thus position itself as an outcast in international relations.<sup>273</sup>

For the Republicans, the legalist-moralist approach countered the demands for collective security that had no support within the party due to its constitutional effects. Providing an international venue for consultation in the spirit of open diplomacy, which enabled world public opinion to apply its pressure to statesmen was, according to McCumber, “as far as we ever need to go” in solving global problems. “There is no necessity of and should be no promise or agreement to support any contention by arms or otherwise”<sup>274</sup> Though President Harding was not able to realize his plan of a series of conferences due to his passing in 1923, his successor Calvin Coolidge did play a crucial role in the 1925 Locarno Conference – the treaties of which, effectively, constituted that of a European Four-Power Treaty. In Locarno, France, Germany, and Belgium agreed to respect the existing borders in Europe, to maintain the demilitarization of the Rhineland, and to refrain from aggressions while both Great Britain and Italy acted as guarantors.<sup>275</sup> This, in turn, illustrated the prevalence of the legalist-moralist approach, and the challenges to its efficiency gained no substantial support. The progressive opponents of the Washington Conference, in fact, challenged the conference within this same framework.

## **4.2 The People’s Fight for Peace: The Populist Criticism of the Washington Conference**

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<sup>272</sup> Fletcher, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.8.1922, pp 3560

<sup>273</sup> McCumber, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.14.1922, pp 3837

<sup>274</sup> McCumber, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.14.1922, pp 3837

<sup>275</sup> Herring 2008, 460

While its supporters largely viewed the Washington Conference as responding to the demands for the New Diplomacy that arose from the wartime experiences, the progressive opponents – including anti-internationalist Republicans and Wilsonian Democrats – viewed the conference not as a breakthrough leading to a new era in international relations but as continuing the reactionary diplomatic practices against which the First World War had been fought. After the war, the Progressive movement was deeply demoralized, as both parties had moved decisively in the conservative direction at the end of the 1910s, excluding progressives from any institutional power. Thus, when progressives organized a bipartisan opposition to the Washington Conference in the Senate, their populist criticism reflected the widespread discontent with the prevailing balance of power in Congress: The political elites in both parties appeared to be under the influence of financial interests, which had supposedly subverted the demands of public opinion in Washington and engendered treaties that enabled imperialistic exploitation typical of the prewar period. These accusations were widely viewed as embarrassing and undermining the entire purpose of the conference to create a new era in world affairs.

The Progressive movement that had united behind President Wilson’s war aims in making “the world safe for democracy” and negotiating a liberal peace was severely weakened after the First World War ended in 1918, and the following decade was consequently characterized by conservative dominance. Much of this was due to the disillusionment resulting from the terms of the Versailles Treaty and the wartime civil rights infringements. These culminated in the so-called Palmer Raids in 1919, in which Wilson’s attorney general Mitchell Palmer arrested and deported thousands of labor activists who had no criminal records.<sup>276</sup> Thus, although Wilson had built his promotion of the League of Nations on a stable domestic basis during the war, large sections of the political left turned against him on the eve of the League membership debate, compounding its defeat in 1919. Many progressives regarded the League – similar to the administration’s wartime policies against dissidents – as reactionary and merely serving the interests of Wall Street at home and imperialists abroad. In the national elections in the late 1910s, the Republican party took control of the federal government in landslide victories, thus ending the progressive governance that had begun with Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency at the turn of the century and later culminated with Wilson’s eight years in office.<sup>277</sup>

On the level of intraparty politics, both parties were in control of their conservative factions at the beginning of the 1920s, and the intraparty divisions were deep especially within the Democratic party. After having lost all of its influence at the federal level, retaining its political positions mainly in the South, the factional politics within the Democratic party turned in favor of the conservatives, who

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<sup>276</sup> Cochran & Navari 2017, 10-12

<sup>277</sup> Knock 2019, 307-311, 321-323; Miller 1999, 49-58

consequently moved the party closer to the Republicans by moderating its reform agenda. This, in turn, evoked anger among progressives such as former Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, who perceived the ascendance of the pro-business conservative wing and the consequent nomination of James Cox as the party's 1920 presidential candidate as a reactionary takeover of the party.<sup>278</sup> The Republicans, although an undisputed majority party, suffered from similar factional tensions. While these had been assuaged by their opposition to Wilson, the intraparty tensions resurfaced after the League membership debate had ended in the clear Republican victory in 1919. The 1920 Republican primaries, in fact, were highly divisive, and the progressive favorite Hiram Johnson (R-CA) regularly accused his conservative challengers of corruption, thus triggering political investigations. Although the party ultimately succeeded in unifying behind the candidacy of Warren G. Harding, the tensions between the progressives and conservatives remained prevalent within the Republican party, too.<sup>279</sup>

The intraparty hostilities surfaced in the debate on the treaties of the Washington Conference in 1922, intertwining with the prevailing partisan polarization that had resulted from the League membership debate. Whereas a small minority of Republican Senators opposed the treaties, the Democratic party split in half after minority leader Oscar Underwood (D-AL), to the dismay of many Wilsonian Democrats, participated in the American delegation at President Harding's request – whom he had befriended in the Senate. Because Underwood had only narrowly defeated the progressive incumbent Gilbert Hitchcock (D-NE) in 1920, replacing him as the leader of the Senate Democratic Caucus, his leadership position was tenuous. As he represented the party's conservative faction (advocating for limited government, decentralization, and pro-business policies), he was strongly opposed by notable progressives such as William Jennings Bryan.<sup>280</sup> Thus, as the treaties of the conference entered into the deliberation of the Senate, the progressives organized an opposition against the treaties, challenging Underwood's leadership. It was even rumored that Wilson himself was sympathetic to the opposition, giving it his tacit approval.<sup>281</sup> (Yet despite rumors, he gave no public statements on the treaties and, as the opponents unequivocally denied Wilson's involvement,<sup>282</sup> these rumors are unverifiable).

The opposition centered on the Four-Power Treaty which, according to opponents, was a product of the secret diplomacy characteristic of imperialistic prewar era politics. This was mainly related to the surprising announcement of the treaty which, as critics such as Hitchcock argued, was “not upon the

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<sup>278</sup> Craig 1992, 15-21

<sup>279</sup> Miller 1999, 23-26, 76-92

<sup>280</sup> Craig 1992, 52-53; Gould 2009, 73; Miller 1999, 115-116

<sup>281</sup> NYT, “See Wilson helping Borah fight treaty; Harding won't lobby” 8. March 1922

<sup>282</sup> NYT, “Lodge is heckled in plea to Senate on 4-Power Treaty” 9. March 1922

agenda” of the conference nor “included in it,” as a result of which “the public neither looked for nor anticipated the appearance of this treaty.”<sup>283</sup> The speculation of secret diplomacy had been prevalent in the debate on the League membership in 1919, and many Republicans – not only the progressives – had expressed concerns regarding Britain’s use of secret treaties that gained it territories in the Middle East and Africa. This further fused with criticisms of secret negotiations, as a result of which critics saw the League as an imperialist conspiracy.<sup>284</sup> In the debate over the treaties of the conference, majority leader and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee Henry Cabot Lodge (R-MA) denied the critics an opportunity to hold the formal committee hearings that could have been used as a way to strengthen the opposition – a tactic familiar to Lodge.<sup>285</sup> The question of secret diplomacy was thus left to be resolved in the floor of the Senate, providing the Democrats with an opportunity to attack the Republicans with the same arguments that the critics had used against Wilson in 1919.

The Democratic opponents, similar to the Republicans three years earlier, speculated on the existence of secret treaties accompanying the Four-Power Treaty and required the party leaders to provide them with details of the negotiations. This speculation was mainly related to rumors originating from the Far Eastern Republic (FER) – a state established in 1920 with the help of Soviet Russia, which was at the time in the grips of a civil war (for the Soviet regime, the FER was a useful buffer state directed against aggressive Japanese expansionism in East Asia). During the conference, the representatives of the FER trade delegation sought to engage with the American public by raising concerns about the Japanese intervention in Siberia. As Paul Dukes notes, the delegation tried to utilize the unpopularity of France to raise these concerns, which had resulted from its opposition to the armament limitations regarding submarines. Consequently, the FER delegates spread rumors of secret dealings between Japan and France – which the French delegation strongly denied.<sup>286</sup> Nonetheless, this intervention into the American political discourse was successful as the rumors continued to circulate. When the treaties of the conference were pending in the Senate, the New York Times published an article in which the head of the FER delegation accused both Japan and France of having agreed to a secret treaty “for the exploitation of Siberia”.<sup>287</sup> Joseph Robinson (D-AR) later raised these concerns in the Senate, and he demanded that the details of the negotiations should be disclosed:

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<sup>283</sup> Hitchcock, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.2.1922, pp 3233

<sup>284</sup> A central argument of the British League advocates, indeed, was that the League served as a tool to advance the interests of the Empire (Holmila & Ihalainen, Contributions to the History of Concepts Vol. 13, No.2 [2018], pp. 34-35, 38)

<sup>285</sup> Miller 1999, 44-49, 148-149; In 1919, Lodge had expertly used his position as a chairman of the Senate foreign relations committee in order to embarrass the President and to strengthen the opposition with long and detailed hearings.

<sup>286</sup> Dukes 2004, 79-80, 93-98

<sup>287</sup> NYT, “Says Joffre Made Far East Accord” 16. March 1922

Mr. President, we want publicity; we want the light turned on this whole subject. If it is right, why should there be so much mystery and concealment in connection with its conception? Why should there be so much information withheld and so little furnished to the Senate concerning the origin and the negotiations which led up to the adoption of the treaty by the conference? Why should not the Senate know about it and why should not the people of the United States know about it? Why should we commit ourselves to the Old World policy of secrecy and mystery, which always means evil intent?<sup>288</sup>

Although these demands were directed as much to Underwood as the Republicans, Lodge assumed the principal responsibility for responding to the speculation regarding secret agreements supposedly accompanying the negotiations on the Four-Power Treaty. As he noted, the termination of the Anglo-Japanese alliance which was the “chief and most important point in the treaty” had in fact “been under discussion for some time before the conference met.” The negotiations regarding ending the alliance were thus held informally, and, as he further warned, excessive transparency “would probably put an end to all negotiations.”<sup>289</sup> Lodge’s reluctance to disclose the details of the proceedings was, arguably, based upon the counterproductive effect that this move would have had: Because the treaty had been primarily drafted by the chief Japanese diplomat Baron Kijuro Shidehara,<sup>290</sup> the disclosure of this fact would have confirmed that the Japanese delegates played a crucial role in the negotiation of the treaty, which would have further fueled speculation concerning the existence of imperialistic secret treaties or understandings regarding the FER. Moreover, as nativist Southern Democrats such as Robinson evoked xenophobia towards Japan by conceptualizing it as a “yellow peril” that posed a threat to Western countries,<sup>291</sup> providing this additional information would have strengthened the opposition within the context of the nativist and hyper-patriotic political environment that was caused by the war and the wartime propaganda.<sup>292</sup>

However, Lodge’s refusal to provide details of the negotiations did fuel the suspicions that the conference only continued the imperialistic prewar diplomacy. Morris Sheppard (D-TX) depicted the Four-Power Treaty as “the outgrowth of secret whisperings beyond the reach of human records” and “a reenthronement of Machiavelli and Caesar Borgia as the tutelary geniuses of mankind.”<sup>293</sup> And like in the debate on the membership in the League, these views intertwined with the progressive criticism of the excesses of capitalism: Like the League, which according to progressive opponents was a tool of international finance to exploit weaker peoples,<sup>294</sup> the Harding administration was accused of dismissing the will of the public in favor of big business in the conference. Thomas Watson

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<sup>288</sup> Robinson, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.18.1922, pp 4073

<sup>289</sup> Lodge, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.8.1922, pp 3547

<sup>290</sup> Nish 2013, 373-381

<sup>291</sup> Robinson, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.9.1922, pp 3610

<sup>292</sup> Hawley 1979, 71

<sup>293</sup> Sheppard, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.22.1922, pp 4260

<sup>294</sup> Cooper Jr. 2001, 100, 128

(D-GA), a prominent anti-League Democrat,<sup>295</sup> implied that Elihu Root, “the lawyer of international bankers” who was part of the American delegation in Washington, had drafted the Four-Power Treaty to benefit the “predatory corporations” by which he had previously been employed. The ensuing imperialistic exploitation betrayed the sacrifices of the soldiers who had fought as “crusaders in the cause of right and justice” in the war, and who believed that after achieving victory “the conscience of the world would be organized, and this conscience would hereafter rule the destinies of mankind.”<sup>296</sup>

The speculation on the extra-parliamentary influences that supposedly surrounded the drafting of the treaty, culminated in a political scandal caused by William Borah (R-ID) who headed the opposition in the Senate. Four days before the Four-Power Treaty finally entered into a vote, Borah astonished the audience by quoting a speech by Paul Cravath – who was part the American foreign policy elite – in a meeting of the Council of Foreign Relations soon after the Washington Conference had ended in February 1922. Cravath, a vice-president of the Council, was a founder of a distinguished New York law firm and a vocal proponent of Anglophile internationalism and he supported closer Anglo-American cooperation, even an alliance.<sup>297</sup> In the speech quoted by Borah, Cravath argued, based on his communication with both the British and American delegates, that a special relationship between the two countries had informally formed, and this meant that a combined Anglo-American fleet would “dominate that of Japan in Japanese waters” in the future. Borah interpreted this as proof that an Anglo-American alliance had been secretly established in order to “cooperate against Japan in case of emergency.”<sup>298</sup> This allegation had grave implications as it suggested that the United States had in secret – as the host country – plotted against one of the delegate-states in the conference.

Though Borah’s maneuver provoked the New York Tribune to describe him as “a man governed not by his judgement but by his hatreds” and as willing to damage “the American statesmanship,”<sup>299</sup> the overwhelmingly negative media reaction failed to grasp his underlying political motives and thinking: As John Milton Cooper Jr. notes, Borah’s theatrical style of populist politics was closely connected to his moralistic understanding of a “good politician” who, rather than trying to affect legislation on an institutional level, would function as the people’s watchman who directs the power of public opinion against the seeming threats that arose from eastern cities; that is, the concentration of wealth in those areas and their morally corrupt urban lifestyles. Not unlike European agrarians, his ideal of

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<sup>295</sup> Woodward 1963, 467-468

<sup>296</sup> Watson, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.17.1922, pp 4013

<sup>297</sup> Miller 1999, 148; Roberts, Australian Journal of Politics & History Vol. 51, No.2 (2005), pp. 197-198

<sup>298</sup> Borah, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.20.1922, pp 4119

<sup>299</sup> The New York Tribune, “Running Amuck” 22. March 1922

society was a culturally conservative agrarian idyl, aloof from global entanglements.<sup>300</sup> The Cravath-incident reflected Borah's political attitudes, which combined populism and moralism: Refraining from any accusations, Borah's interest was in bringing the issue into the public light and in organizing public opinion behind his cause and against shadowy interest groups. As Cravath's New York firm also represented "the most powerful financial interests in the United States, if not in the world," as Borah stated,<sup>301</sup> he thus waged a campaign against all of his domestic enemies: The internationalist financial elites in the East that operated outside of the public's gaze in order to influence policy.

Moreover, Borah translated his style of populist politics into international affairs, which reflected the progressive side of his anti-internationalism: While he opposed internationalist projects, having also led the opposition against the membership in the League, he relied on the power of informed and vigilant public opinion to pressure governments into peace. In 1921, soon after Warren Harding was nominated, Borah compelled the new administration to organize the Disarmament Conference in Washington by mobilizing a public movement behind his cause, which ultimately led to the treaty on naval armament limitations.<sup>302</sup> While he viewed the treaty as a promising "first step in the cause of disarmament," which had been achieved through "the power and stress of public opinion,"<sup>303</sup> he still emphasized the importance of sustaining the public pressure on governments – without which peace would fail: "This is the people's fight, and to lull them into inactivity by giving out the word that disarmament has been achieved or that sufficient has been achieved to warrant inactivity would be to betray the whole cause and to imperil civilization."<sup>304</sup> Thus, while proponents such as Irving Lenroot (R-WI) viewed Borah as overly "pessimistic" because he apparently did not take into account the postwar progress in democratization,<sup>305</sup> Borah's distrust of political elites both at home and abroad compelled him to stress the importance of promoting public vigilance in achieving peace.

Many Republicans, however, saw Borah's allegations and the chauvinistic attacks against the other delegate-nations as destructive to the entire work of the Washington Conference. President Harding denounced Borah's assertions as "outrageous,"<sup>306</sup> and Cravath himself denied any claims of having knowledge of secret agreements. The stenographers, he argued, had misquoted him as he had only spoken in favor of Anglo-American cooperation in general.<sup>307</sup> And as he provided an original copy

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<sup>300</sup> Cooper Jr. *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* Vol. 56, no. 4 (1965), pp. 145-149

<sup>301</sup> Borah, *U.S Congressional Record* Vol.62, 3.20.1922, pp 4124

<sup>302</sup> Miller 1999, 112-114

<sup>303</sup> Borah, *U.S Congressional Record* Vol.62, 3.29.1922, pp 4704

<sup>304</sup> Borah, *U.S Congressional Record* Vol.62, 3.29.1922, pp 4706

<sup>305</sup> Lenroot, *U.S Congressional Record* Vol.62, 3.18.1922, pp 4080

<sup>306</sup> NYTR, "Harding calls Borah charge outrageous" 22. March 1922

<sup>307</sup> NYT, "Declares Cravath said we were bound secretly to Britain" 21. March 1922

of his speech to the press, speculation on the issue quickly came to an end.<sup>308</sup> Yet, the general tenor of the opposition, Samuel Shortridge (R-CA) regretted, was in and of itself “provocative of ill will, of estrangement, it might be (...) even of war.”<sup>309</sup> According to Republicans, the opposition undermined the effort to lay the moral foundation for a new peaceful era in world affairs. “We are venturing now on a great undertaking of directing foreign relations,” Elihu Root argued, and this required that other countries “understood that the American people will taboo loose and unfriendly talk” and penalize the “Vindictive minority” in the elections.<sup>310</sup> This, according to Root, who was a preeminent authority on the question of foreign relations within the Republican party having served as Theodore Roosevelt’s Secretary of State,<sup>311</sup> was the “duty of the democracy” because allowing hostile attitudes to prevail would give rise to antagonisms and wars.<sup>312</sup>

However, there was a wide consensus on what Root had termed in 1917 to be the establishment of “standards” backed by international public opinion, which would consequently establish peace.<sup>313</sup> The culmination of this type of legalist-moralist approach was the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Treaty aimed at outlawing war as a policy. Although maligned for its overt idealism, this type of approach was an obvious policy for the Republicans due to the lack of feasible alternatives. Nationalist Republicans such as Borah, whose political influence only grew during the course of the 1920s as he assumed the position of the chairman of Foreign Relations Committee after Lodge’s death in 1925, would not hesitate to confront the Republican leaders with serious allegations, knowing that the party’s electoral chances depended on their support in the West.<sup>314</sup> Borah, in fact, was at the forefront of a peace movement trying to pressure the government and future Secretary of State Frank Kellogg (R-MN) to agree to this policy. As in the case of the Washington Conference, he was successful at achieving agreement. As the epitome of the Republican interwar foreign policy, the treaty is still in effect.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> NYT, “Two versions found of Cravath speech” 22. March 1922

<sup>309</sup> Shortridge, U.S Congressional Record Vol.62, 3.22.1922, pp 4244

<sup>310</sup> NYTR, “Loose talk is seed of Wars, Root warns” 30. March 1922

<sup>311</sup> Russell 2017, 22-24

<sup>312</sup> NYTR, “Loose talk is seed of Wars, Root warns” 30. March 1922

<sup>313</sup> Russell 2017, 43

<sup>314</sup> Miller 1999, 91-94, 169, 178-179

<sup>315</sup> Nichols 2011, 300-309; Debenedetti, *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (1972), pp. 22-29

## 5. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to reconstruct and analyze the competing and ideologically motivated understandings and conceptualizations of the ideal approaches to international relations in the debate over the treaties of the Washington Conference in 1922 by using methods from political, conceptual, and intellectual history and discourse analysis. Rather than focusing on administration officials and diplomatic elites as in traditional diplomatic or political history, I have sought to illustrate in this thesis the various ideological underpinnings of the contemporaries with regard to the restructuring of postwar international relations by focusing on discursive processes in congressional and press debates in 1922. The findings in this study largely corroborate what has been argued about American postwar foreign policy previously; that is, that after the Senate voted against the League membership at the turn of the decade, political will for ambitious internationalist projects diminished, while the Senate's assertiveness in foreign policy concomitantly increased. Yet this thesis has sought to contribute to an improved understanding of political dynamics involved in the political decisions, which would inform the logic behind American foreign policy at the beginning of the 1920s.

The key finding of this thesis is that in the Washington Conference the Republican party successfully repudiated the internationalist vision of President Woodrow Wilson and laid the foundation for a new conservative consensus regarding the solving of international problems. Instead of adhering to world organizations like that of the League of Nations or adopting the foreign policy of aloofness as favored by the most nationalist elements in the Senate, the Republicans successfully established the political consensus on a limited form of internationalism, the legitimacy of which was founded on its unradical and practical nature. While Wilson's League was understood as ineffective, if not even utopian, and thus unable to create peace, anti-internationalism as promulgated by the most vehement nationalists in the Senate was widely seen as a non-answer to global problems. It would have, detrimentally, left the country outside of constructive international cooperation. The Washington Conference, however, provided a practical alternative for these two: The United States, rather than discarding international cooperation altogether along with the membership in the League, was committed to peace but without compromises with regard to national sovereignty and the nation's freedom of action. The Republicans placed their trust on voluntarism and gradual and regionally-oriented improvements rather than any institutional mechanisms that aimed at regulating transnational relations.

As is discussed in Chapter 2, there was little support for insular nationalism and the foreign policy of isolation in the Senate. In an increasingly more interconnected world, most Senators understood that the United States could not continue its traditional policy of aloofness without adjustments, and thus

it was seen as imperative that the country reengaged with international affairs after the Senate rejected the League membership. The prevailing question, therefore, was not whether the United States should engage in international cooperation but how, and what was the appropriate definition of “good internationalism.” Although many Wilsonian Democrats remained committed to the universalist and aspirational internationalist vision laid down by the former Democratic President, whose vision of a new postwar world order centered on the transformational role of the League, the political discourse had nonetheless moved beyond idealistic Wilsonian internationalism in favor of a regionally-oriented and limited approach in the early 1920s. Without forsaking their support for the League, even some pro-League elements moved toward the Republicans and they moderated the idealism that President Wilson had associated with the League in the late 1910s.

Nevertheless, though the majority of Senators in both parties were in favor of increasing international cooperation in some form or another, anti-internationalists did have a significant negative influence to limit the scope of these schemes. For them, the priority was the safeguarding of national traditions and the vision of the Founding Fathers that had their roots in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Relying especially on President George Washington’s 1796 Farewell Address, in which Washington had laid the basis for cautious and limited foreign engagement, anti-internationalists sought to uphold the country’s *moral leadership* that resulted from its aloof international position. In other words, by remaining aloof from all foreign entanglements, the United States was able to exercise its free moral judgment and to act as an impartial mediator between belligerents and thus establish peace. Most of these anti-internationalists were agrarian pacifists who, like many internationalists, prioritized peace in foreign policy. However, because of the ambiguousness of the concept of moral leadership, these Senators were unable to provide a viable positive alternative to either the League or the Washington Conference. Thus, their political influence was principally negative and reduced to the opposition to internationalism and far-reaching international commitments – which was not insignificant.

This negative influence of the anti-internationalist Senators was evident in the debate over the proper international commitments. As is examined in Chapter 3, two competing paradigms for transnational obligations existed in political discourse at the beginning of the 1920s: While Wilsonian Democrats were supportive of universal international commitments to collective security in order to prevent the reappearance of the old system of balance of power and entangling alliances, which supposedly had led to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, many Republicans emphasized both national sovereignty and constitutionality. The United States, as Republican Senators argued, could not adopt transnational obligations that would commit the country to mutual defense because this would violate the prerogatives of Congress in declaring war, also limiting the country’s freedom of action in world

affairs. For the most ardent nationalists, this was also the priority, and they pressured the Republican administration to steer clear from all international arrangements that could be construed as alliances. Thus, rather than expanding the obligations in the treaties of the conference, the Republican leaders agreed to limit them even further. This, in turn, demonstrated the weakness of the Democrats: Instead of expanding the obligations, as many of them advocated, the Republicans reaffirmed the limited and regional focus in the treaties through modifications.

Nevertheless, despite the various ideological differences in the Senate, there was wide support for the legalistic-moralistic approach to global problems, which continued to characterize the United States foreign policy throughout the interwar period. Most Senators, as is discussed in Chapter 4, considered that the democratization of diplomacy and the power of world public opinion was sufficient to create the basis for lasting peace. Although these views were popularized by President Wilson during the war, as he advocated “the New Diplomacy,” the Republicans largely adopted his rhetoric and they dissociated it from the League: The Washington Conference, according to Republicans, had laid the basis for the increasing democratic control of diplomacy in the future and, through its treaties, it had developed international norms by utilizing the moral power of public opinion – not the League as Wilson had envisioned. Though criticized for its overt idealism, the reliance on this approach – the development of international legal code and open diplomacy – was the only available alternative for the consecutive Republican administrations in the 1920s. Because entering into collective security arrangements would have fragmented the Republican party, thus strengthening the Democrats, the Republicans relied on public opinion and the democratized diplomacy as guarantors of peace.

The success of the Republican internationalists in defining the discursive parameters for proper global engagement was largely a result of the electoral swings at the turn of the 1920s, which had reinstated the Republican party’s status as the majority party after almost a decade of bitter factional infighting. The Democratic party, after Wilson’s presidency, suffered overwhelming defeats in both presidential and congressional elections, which rendered it to the position of the minority party. This was a clear repudiation of Wilson’s policies, and it gave the Republicans a mandate to determine a new course for American foreign policy. The Democratic party, on the other hand, was after the electoral losses incentivized to readjust its disposition to foreign relations and renounce its uncompromising position regarding the League membership. Instead of continuing to demand the Senate to vote for the League membership without modifications, the Democratic party under the leadership of Senate minority leader Oscar Underwood (D-AL) was willing to move toward the Republicans on many policy questions. Indeed, in 1921, Underwood participated in the United States delegation to the Washington Conference at President Harding’s request. The following debate over the treaties of the conference

in the Senate divided the party, and, without Underwood's leadership, the treaties of the conference would not have been ratified.

Overall, the primary conclusion of this thesis is that there was little viable opposition to the limited form of internationalism promulgated by the internationalist Republican mainstream at the beginning of the 1920s. In the debate over the treaties of the Washington Conference, the Republicans succeeded in laying the basis for a new conservative consensus and a new direction for American foreign policy in the interwar period. In the subsequent conferences and international negotiations, the United States sought to extend the naval armament limitations agreed upon in Washington and, in 1928, the Coolidge administration succeeded in negotiating the so-called Kellogg-Briand Treaty that outlawed war as policy – the apex of the Republican interwar diplomacy. Instead of returning to isolationism, the concept that was not in circulation in the 1920s, the country did play important role in world politics in the interwar period, and hence the term is more applicable to the politics in the 1930s when Congress passed strict neutrality laws. After the Second World War, in stark contrast to the idealism of the 1920s and the strict adherence to the vision of the Founding Fathers, the United States adopted a significantly more active role in European politics, being at the center of Western alliance systems. Further research of this transformation would be fruitful – particularly, by studying the contemporary political discourses and conceptual changes.

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